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The New York Times Magazine



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Photographed by Kathy Ryan at *The New York Times* on Feb. 22, 2017, at 4:10 p.m.

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Readers respond to the 2.26.2017 issue.

RE: THE FUTURE OF WORK ISSUE

The Feb. 26 issue was dedicated to the future of the working class, with articles on universal basic income, retraining, automation and the American work force.

Great issue on the future of work. Our educators should read this issue and start to focus more attention on preparing our youth for the jobs of tomorrow. The needs of employers are changing. Our schools should recognize that the world is changing. So should curriculums.
Paul Feiner, Greenburgh, N.Y.

In Barbara Ehrenreich's engaging article on evolving methods of organizing workers, the co-authors of important collaborative research on rising working-class mortality rates are identified as "Angus Deaton, a Nobel laureate in economics, with his wife, Anne Case." Anne Case holds an endowed professorship in economics at Princeton University, and she has won several prizes and awards for her research on health and economics. These, not her marital status, are her relevant qualifications in the context of this article. Given that The Times has published articles in the past critiquing yourselves and other media outlets for this very manner of understating the qualifications and contributions of women when they collaborate with men, using this same couple as an example, it is discouraging that you still can't get this right.

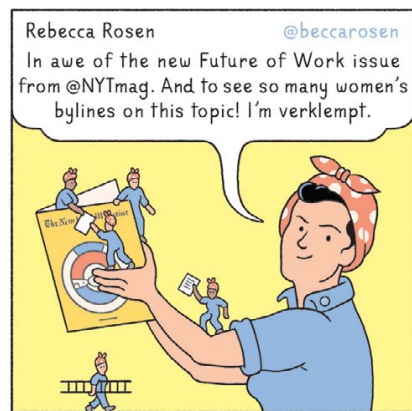
Deborah Beck, Austin, Tex.

The beautiful thing about GiveDirectly's approach to universal basic income is that it lets people devise their own



path out of poverty. As similar projects have demonstrated, this simple concept creates effective and efficient outcomes. Why? Because individuals know their own lives and needs much more than a think tank from some paternalistic or politically motivated aid agency.

We need to stop treating the world's poor like children. People have the knowledge and drive to better themselves.
Annette de Soto, Seattle



RE: FIRST WORDS

Nikole Hannah-Jones wrote about public schools, Betsy DeVos and which government institutions benefit which citizens.

Thank you, Nikole Hannah-Jones, for making plain how antiblackness and the effort to subjugate black and brown people and those deemed "other" are enduring subtexts to all our fights around education. There is a direct line from efforts to eradicate the language and culture of native people to the substandard education offered to the formerly enslaved and our "no excuses" or test-obsessed charters today. From assimilating the Irish and Italians into whiteness to our current battles to eradicate bilingualism (but only among those whose first language isn't English); from yesterday's redlining and blockbusting to today's gentrification and deportations.

The underlying theory is that schools sort students into winners and losers, that parents want to seek competitive advantage so their children are on top and that the means for gaining advantage as well as the results are highly racialized to maintain white supremacy. As we approach an era with no racial majority, we must reconfigure our schools to center



THE ISSUE, ON TWITTER

Fascinating read in @NYTmag on the new working class. Pretty sure @realDonaldTrump doesn't understand what these folks do or how to help.
@mommyprayers

'As we approach an era with no racial majority, we must reconfigure our schools to center pluralism in a global society.'

pluralism in a global society, or else go the way of xenophobic, stagnant and insular societies that have been consigned to history's trash heap.

Beth Glenn, Director, Education Justice Network, Washington

Hannah-Jones's article is misguided in at least two respects. First, she assumes that "public education" can mean only one thing: a uniform structure delivered exclusively by the state. The United States is virtually alone in this; most democracies enjoy educational pluralism, in which the state funds many types of schools and holds them to the same standards.

Second, Hannah-Jones suggests that the clearest indicator of caring about the common good would be for economically advantaged families to remain in low-performing district schools. Other, more concrete indicators present a different picture: Schools with rigorous academic programs and coherent cultures do a particularly good job of cultivating students' civic behavior. The moral claim behind school-choice mechanisms is that they increase disadvantaged students' access to such schools and such capacities.

Hannah-Jones need not interpret tax credits and vouchers as antidemocratic or individualistic. Educational pluralism may, in fact, represent the opposite.

Ashley Rogers Berner, Deputy Director, Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, Baltimore



CORRECTION

An article on Feb. 19 about prunes misspelled the name of one variety. It is *le petit pruneau d'Agen*, not *la petite pruneau d'Agen*.

Send your thoughts to magazine@nytimes.com.



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THE
MUSIC
ISSUE



A strange thing you learn about American popular music, if you look back far enough, is that for a long time it didn't much have "genres" — it had ethnicities. Vaudeville acts, for instance, had tunes for just about every major immigrant group: the Italian number, the Yiddish number, the Irish one, the Chinese. Some were sung in a spirit of abuse; others were written or performed by members of those groups themselves. And of course there were the minstrel shows, in which people with mocking, cork-painted faces sang what they pretended were the songs of Southern former slaves. This was how we reckoned with our melting pot: crudely, obviously, maybe with a nice tune and a beat you could dance to.

Sometime in the 1950s, the mainstream saw its last great gasp of this habit. A nation that considered itself very space-age and worldly enjoyed quaint spins on sentimental Italian music ("That's Amore" and its pizza pies) and Trinidadian calypso songs about hard, simple labor ("Day-O" and its bananas). You had your "Latin" numbers, your Hawaiian ones, your "Asian" songs — light ethnic pastiches laid out cheerily, like an international buffet that serves falafel one day and schnitzel the next, never too bothered about how accurate the recipes are.

There was a simple notion behind all this stuff, and it was the belief that music, like food, *came* from someplace, and from some people. Even when it was played in a condescending ethnic-joke burlesque of who those people actually were — even when it was pretty aggressively racist — the notion remained: Different styles sprang from different people. Then all of this changed, and we decided to start thinking of pop music not as a folk tradition but as an art; we started to picture musicians as people who *invented* sounds and styles, making intellectual decisions about their work.

But music is still, pretty obviously, tied to people. How else do you create a situation in which, after decades of hip-hop's being the main engine of pop music, it can still be a little complicated when nonblack people

rap? That vexed thing we call “identity” leans its considerable weight on all kinds of questions: which sounds comfort us or excite us; where and how we listen to them; how we move our bodies as they play. Watch a mere silhouette of a human being dancing to music, and you can immediately guess things about who they are and where they came from.

In 2017, identity is the topic at the absolute center of our conversations about music. There may be times when this fact grates at us, when it feels as though there must be other dimensions of the world to attend to; “surely,” you moan, “there are songs that speak to basic human emotions in ways that transcend the particulars of who we are!” But if you look through the essays in this magazine, you may notice two things. One is that, unbidden and according to no plan, they find themselves continually reckoning with questions of identity. The other is that they’re doing this because *the musicians are, too*.

A Japanese-American musician writes a song called “Your Best American Girl.” An R.&B. singer titles one “F.U.B.U.” — or, “for us, by us.” Are you part of her “us”? The house music in Kanye West’s “Fade”: Does it make you picture the black Chicagoans who helped invent it or the club-going Europeans who embraced it? How does it work when a queer woman matches the sexual braggadocio of male rappers, when L.G.B.T. activists sing a country song for a restaurant chain that once fired gay employees, when Leonard Cohen revisits his childhood religious inheritance?

This is what we talk about now, the music-makers and the music-listeners both. Not the fine details of genre and style — everyone, allegedly, listens to everything now — but the networks of identity that float within them. Maybe decades ago you could aim your songs at a mass market, but music does not really have one of those anymore. Artists have to figure out whom they’re speaking to and where they’re speaking from. The rest of us do the same. For better or worse, it’s all identity now.

Nitsuh Abebe



‘Send My Love (to Your New Lover)’

ADELE

All I want to do is dance — but it’s complicated.

BY WESLEY MORRIS

Loving Adele shouldn’t be that hard. When a chorus brings her voice to its cruising altitude, it’s like you’re up there, flying with it. Down here, on earth, where her third album, “25,” made Adele the top-selling artist of 2015 and 2016, she has that realness we say we value in the people we elevate to stardom; last month, during the Grammys telecast, she cursed as she interrupted a laconic version of George Michael’s “Fastlove” in order to get the tempo right.

But even Adele knows that loving Adele is complicated. At the Grammys, “25” won album of the year, and a poignant portion of her acceptance speech was a tribute to Beyoncé, whose album “Lemonade” broke the cultural Richter scale — and didn’t win any of the big awards. The moment was poignant because it was earnest: Adele stood just a few feet in front of the woman she called her “idol” and spoke of how “Lemonade” had

empowered her and “my black friends.” This was the sort of candor you usually have to wait for Kanye West to deliver, only with none of West’s biliousness, recrimination and, however myopic, sense of history. Adele didn’t have to acknowledge that history — of a white industry’s crowning preference for white artists. She was living it.

Black people have never been necessary to make black music. But it has become obligatory for white artists who do (and who win prizes for it) to pay a public contrition tax to their black peers, whether it’s Adele to Beyoncé or, three years earlier, Macklemore texting (then publicizing) an apology to Kendrick Lamar for having won (with Ryan Lewis) the Grammys in the rap category. That’s the future of music: recognizing, in the present, that you’re permanently indentured to the past.

Setting aside its enormous sales, “25” is not the artistically catholic landmark that “Lemonade” is but an old-fashioned record, built around the bloom and flare of Adele’s singing. Some of the hooks, though, could catch a whale. And isn’t whaling pop’s whole point?

Yes, certain cultural institutions have a habit of setting traps that trigger trauma. But when it’s just me and Adele — very good Adele, catchy-as-hell Adele — the triggers lock. “Send My Love (to Your New Lover),” the second track on “25,” makes you mad that we live in a world where what happens at the Grammys can’t *not* matter. It makes you mad that we put a political price tag on this kind of perfection. I must have danced to this song 200 times, in blocks of repeats. (Why doesn’t this woman make more fast songs?)

It starts with her saying, “Just the guitar. O.K., cool.” Then comes the rhythmic plink of a guitar Lindsey Buckingham might have picked. The plink is married to a kick drum’s heartbeat. Then comes The Voice, at a low smolder, the smoke still rising from a crater of disillusionment. By the prechorus, her voice is flanked by other Adeles swooping in, on multiple tracks, to dispel the dismay of

LENGTH:
3:43

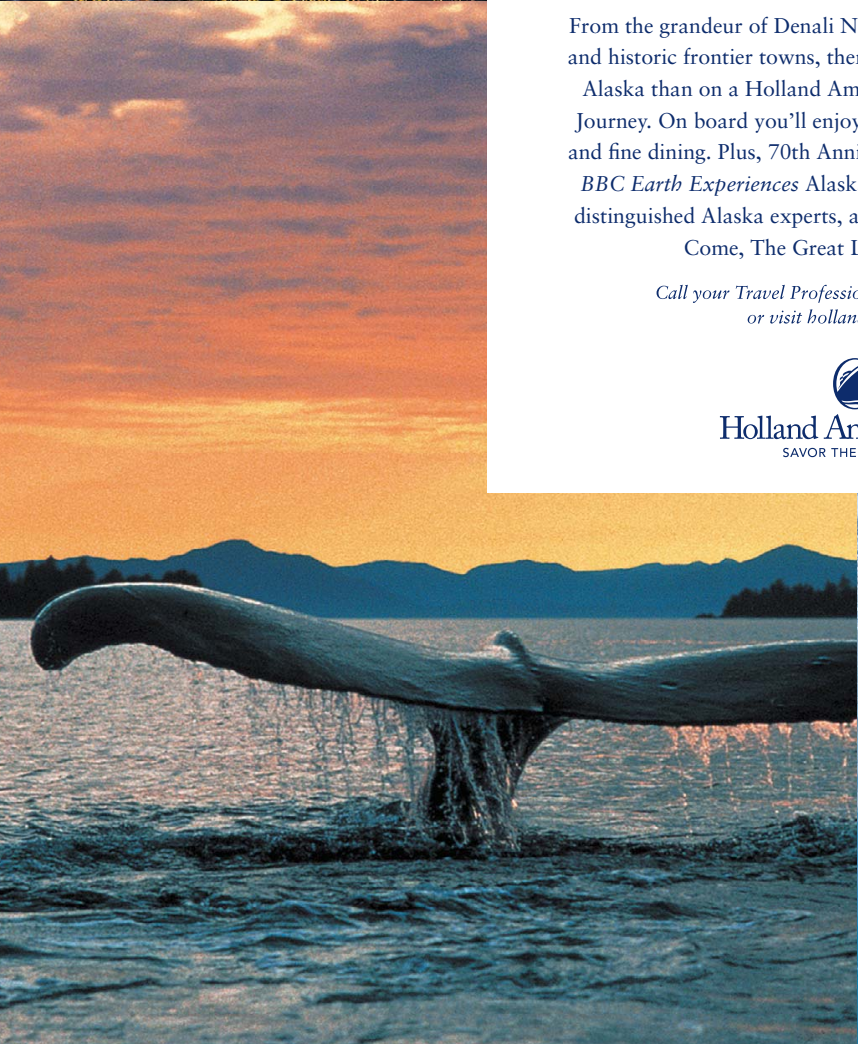
LYRIC:
‘I’m giving
you up/I’ve
forgiven
it all/You set
me free.’



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having dated someone with cold feet and to wish the best for this person's next girlfriend. "Send my love to your new lover. Treat her better," she sings, going up a note and adding an extra, addictive breath to "lover."

Is this a black song? It moves in dance-hall time. The swelling repetitions are chillingly churchy. And the voice itself has what can be only called soul. It's in the pews, the rafters and the aisles. I love this song because it makes me feel strong — as strong as singing "We gon' slay" any time Beyoncé does. In other words, "Send My Love" sets out to catch a whale. This song makes me feel ridiculous for reacting to institutional biases that pressure us into calling Adele a trespasser. All I want to do when I hear it is call her Ishmael. ♦



2.

'You Want It Darker'

LEONARD COHEN

After a long life, he is ready.

BY JONATHAN MAHLER

It wasn't an email from God, but it was close. Leonard Cohen had written to ask if Gideon Zelermyer, the cantor of Congregation Shaar Hashomayim near Montreal — Cohen's childhood synagogue — was interested in recording with him.

Zelermyer was soon sitting inside the synagogue's sanctuary with a few members of Shaar's all-male choir, playing with different arrangements for "You Want It Darker," the title track of Cohen's 14th and final studio album. Some of the words Cohen had given them to work with were familiar; they were borrowed from two of Judaism's holiest prayers. One is the Kaddish, recited by mourners after the death

of a loved one. The other is the High Holy Days prayer *Hineni* — literally, "Here I am" — a personal entreaty to God, the worshiper asking plaintively for mercy. The choir's voices are

the first sounds you hear on the album, their ethereal harmonics giving way to sparse instrumentation and Cohen's weary, subterranean growl, then returning to back up the song's choruses and final movement.

This was hardly the first time that Cohen had drawn on his Judaism for his music. Though he had a complicated relationship

with his religious inheritance, it provided a natural vocabulary for him; it was what he knew, and its stories of human suffering and, occasionally, redemption suited his poet's pull toward the existential. But never before have Cohen's biblical references felt so charged, so dark, so pointed. "Magnified, sanctified, be thy holy name," he sings. "Vilified, crucified, in the human frame. A million candles burning for the help that never came. You want it darker." Then, echoing the words that Abraham spoke as he answered God's command to sacrifice his only son: "*Hineni*, I'm ready, my Lord."

You can't listen to these words without thinking about the fact that Cohen was dying when he recorded them. It's one thing to meditate on faith and mortality when death is an abstraction. It is surely another when you can feel it bearing down on you. And yet the choir's harmonies manage to transform the song, lifting Cohen's solitary struggle into something universal, even eternal.

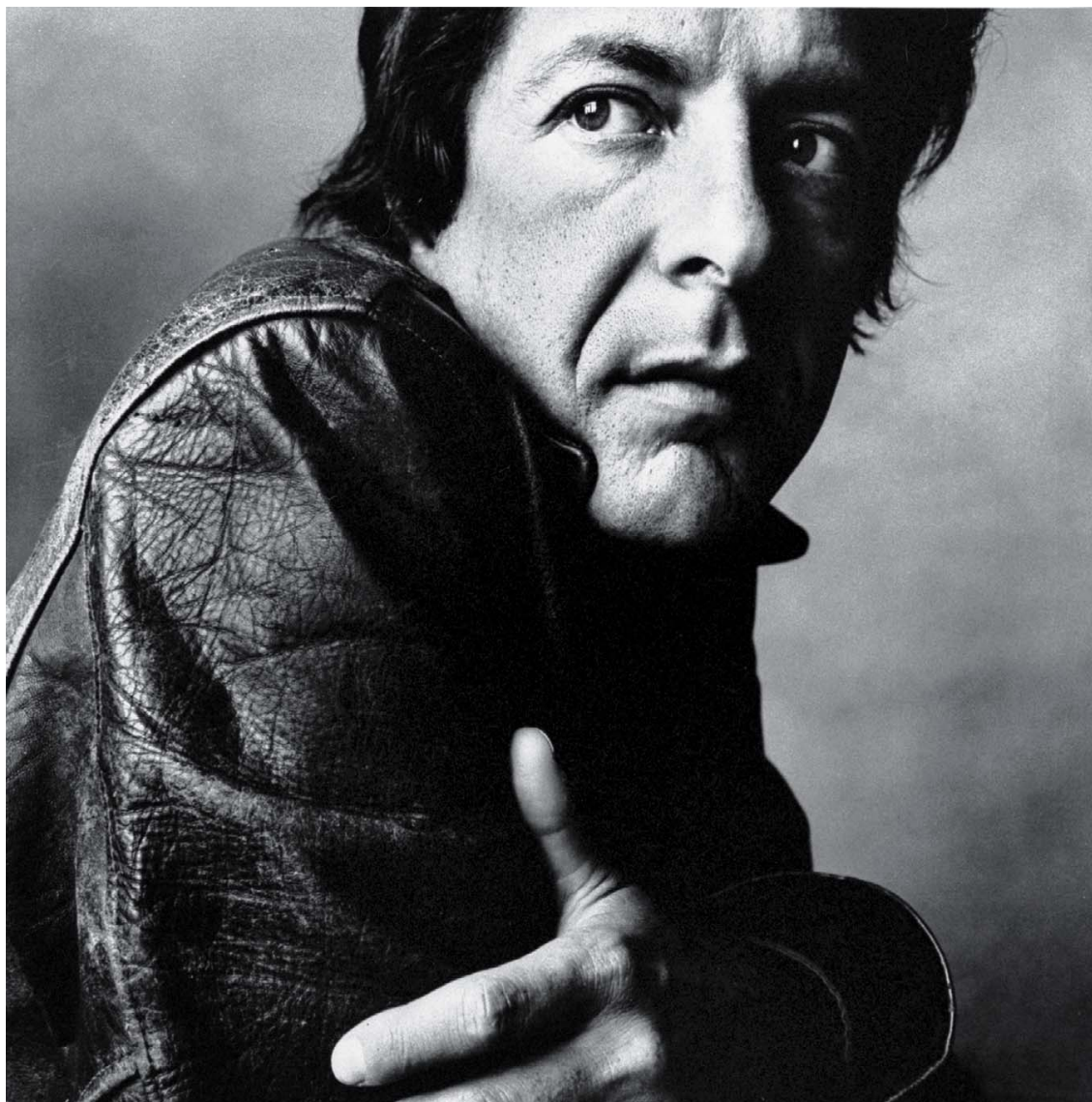
Cohen once said that he did not think of himself as a religious person, but his life was in many ways an extended spiritual journey. Buddhism, Scientology, kabbalah, Hare Krishna, Hinduism — Cohen sampled them all. Yet in his final years, he found himself drawn back to the 171-year-old synagogue where he had become a bar mitzvah, where both his grandfather and great-grandfather served as presidents, where a photograph of his Hebrew-school class taken in 1949 still hangs on the wall. Cohen was

LENGTH:

4:44

LYRIC:

'But it's written in the scriptures/And it's not some idle claim/ You want it darker/ We kill the flame.'



living in Los Angeles, but a cousin in Montreal sent him a recording of Zelermyer and his choir, reuniting Cohen with sounds that had never stopped echoing in his head. He and the cantor struck up an email correspondence. “May your voice reach that Place and bring down the blessings,” Cohen wrote Zelermyer in 2008, before the High Holy Days. (“He can’t write anything normally, can he?” the cantor remembers thinking.) And then several years later came the note, asking for help with a new record. As Cohen put it, “I’m looking for a sound like the Shaar choir and cantor of my youth.”

In October, the record-release event for “You Want It Darker” was held at the residence of the Canadian consul general in Los Angeles. Zelermyer was seated with the other V.I.P.s in the front row. It was the first time he had met Cohen in person. It would also be the last. Weeks later, Cohen’s coffin was lowered into the earth at Shaar Hashomayim’s cemetery. Zelermyer stood next to Cohen’s family as they recited the Kaddish. ♦



3.

‘I’m Better’

MISSY ELLIOTT

A rap legend bends the present into a hopeful future.

BY JULIANNE ESCOBEDO
SHEPHERD

When Missy Elliott divines the future in her science-fiction-inflected videos, she never envisions dystopia. Even in the over-size jacket bearing the slogan “Save the Humans” that she wears in the video for “I’m Better,” her optimism supersedes the plea. Positivity feels like an intrinsic part of her message and her temperament, and in a climate of uncertainty and fear, “I’m Better” is an alien message of hope, full of sneaky inspiration meant to help us get up in the morning, rise-and-grind style. “It’s another day, another chance,” the Miami producer Lamb raps, helping Elliott out on the chorus. “I wake up, I wanna dance. So as long as I got my friends... I’m better, I’m better, I’m better!”

Released in the last week of January, the signature futurism of “I’m Better” was a welcome jolt. The beat is so stark it’s almost jarring, with a tiptoeing synth melody that makes Elliott sound like some kind of gumshoe on the case, tracking down dudes in the act of creeping. Characteristically slick, the video features dancers in headgear that mimics light-therapy acne masks. Elliott gleams in outlandish feathered adornment and lip gloss the color of a vinyl record, delivering cheeky brags about her coterie of admirers, who watch her “like he watchin’ ‘Scandal’ — but I’m just here with my girls.”

Elliott’s approach has always been an antidote to conservatism, both within music and sometimes outside it. She’s unwilling to abide by any perceived rules of language. For years, she has bent rhythmic parameters and willfully warped nouns so that they rhyme, as if to prove that there’s always another, probably far cooler way of going about life and language than the rest of us have recognized. On “I’m Better,” she rhymes the Spanish word for “fire” with an English word for a car — “He say I’m hot, I’m so fue-eh-go/Pull up on him in my veh-heh-co.” These tricks carry such uncomplicated joy that they give us permission to celebrate too.

THE SONG IS AN ALIEN MESSAGE OF HOPE, FULL OF SNEAKY INSPIRATION MEANT TO HELP US GET UP IN THE MORNING, RISE-AND-GRIND STYLE.

“He say I’m pretty, I’m pretty, you must be from Brazil, I must be from México,” she concludes, rhyming the Spanish pronunciation — and giving dap to those of us with origins in the global South, who could use the shout-out these days.

“I’m Better” also positions Elliott in the American South, the Virginia of her upbringing, as well as Orlando, Miami, Atlanta. Its sound adheres to current trends in Southern hip-hop — which is curious, because Elliott sets trends but rarely follows them. Yet by employing the syrupy, stripped-down delivery so many young Southern rappers favor,

she establishes a lineage, from her work to theirs: Stylistically, it is difficult to imagine a Migos without a Missy Elliott.

For Elliott to position herself within a style that’s popular and yet often derided, usually by Northerners and hip-hop fans over the age of 25 — for her to sprinkle her flavor on the 2017 iteration of music made for the subwoofers in your Jeep — does a real service to youth culture. More than most rappers, she seems to bend time to her will. And if she can’t stop it, she will swerve around it. ♦

LENGTH:
3:33

LYRIC:
‘When I rock,
make it bop
in my car/And
it bang bang
bang, like go
blap blap blap.’





'MASK OFF'

Party music for the age of opiates.

BY AMOS BARSHAD • PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIK MADIGAN HECK

FUTURE





spent a large chunk of 2016 trying to talk to Future. I hounded and pressed his P.R. team. Around the top of the year, my nagging paid off; as instructed, I flew from New York to London for an audience with the rapper. I was set to join his tour and follow him for a few days through Europe. Very soon, I would find, things would not break my way.

On the first night I found myself at a chicken shop called Nando's, directly across the street from his overflowing concert venue, rather than backstage as planned. With great envy, I stared at the crowd flowing in as I munched my breast-and-wing combo.

Future had just sat down for an interview with the BBC's Charlie Sloth, who asked him about his relationship with Blac Chyna, the Kardashian-affiliated reality-TV personality with whom he'd possibly been romantically involved. "Are you two still cool?" Sloth asked, in a punchy London rumble. "We great," Future responded, in his trademark flat-affect reserve.

Privately, though, the entreaty into his personal life enraged him. He declared an immediate media blackout. I was in line for his concert when I got the call from P.R.: The interview was decisively off. I spent a weekend eating delicious Pakistani food, watching Tottenham play Leicester City, hoping for a change of mind that never came.

At that point, Future was roughly two years into a radical public and artistic reimagining. It started in the fall of 2014, not long after his breakup with the R.&B. singer Ciara and the soft landing of his pop-friendly sophomore album, "Honest." The failure became an important inflection point. Over the next few years, he created a swelling mass of music with a cloaking grandness to it: Take a step inside, and you were

entombed. The songs were lean and incessant and almost completely devoid of any other voice but Future's. And what that voice was intimating to us, from behind the thickest of blackout curtains, was that our man had given up on his conscience and that he was guzzling the prescription cough syrup Promethazine and downing Xanax and that he was having sex with women he did not really care about and that this was neither making him feel good nor bad but rather it was making him feel nothing.

And then, the really weird part: Suddenly, rightfully, Future was considered an artist who could not be ignored, our best next hope for rap-star transcendence. Embracing personal destruction took him *there*. Was it a meltdown or a rise? What were we to make of a man who made party music out of a death rattle? How should I know? I was stuck at Nando's.

THIS FEBRUARY, after a period of uncharacteristic dormancy, Future — born Nayvadius Wilburn in 1983 in Atlanta — returned with a barage. He released two albums in two weeks, and there are rumors of a third. On the heartbroken "HNDXXX," he gushed and apologized and balladeered. Future has always had a cockeyed crooner alter-ego; here, it takes the whole stage, suggesting one tantalizing path forward for his discography. And on "Future," he boasted and bragged and sounded weirdly content.

**IT'S THE HIGH
AND THE
COMEDOWN
OVER AND
OVER AGAIN.**

LENGTH:
3:23

LYRIC:
'My guillotine
— drank
Promethazine.'

Take "Mask Off," a down-tempo track built, by the elite producer Metro Boomin, around a bizarre but lovely woodwind sample. The song hints at a certain kind of violence and ruthlessness, the kind suggested by a criminal setting off into the night and choosing to leave the ski mask at home. And yet it's the kind of song you would want the D.J. to slip on right when you've lost count of your drinks and you're feeling buzzy and smiley and warm.

Historically, M.C.s have treated narcotics as product to be moved; today's younger, party-happy rappers give drugs a gleeful knuckle-head spin. But when Future describes his voluminous intake, he does so with all the zeal of a man popping open a days-of-the-week pill organizer. On the hook to "Mask Off," Future rattles off drugs, unsentimentally: "Percocets/Molly, Percocets." For him, sometimes the drugs are great; sometimes, not so much. On "Mask Off," amid rhymes about how totally fun and good his life is, he calls Promethazine his "guillotine."

It feels reductive to try to pin an artist down on the sins of his persona. Hip-hop's greatest running trick has been blurring the lines of "real life" and art. But with the rate at which Future was rapping about drugs, one question was inevitably posed: Is this an addiction? If so, it was a new spin on a classic trope. The arc of pretty much every drug movie mimics the whiz-bang of the initial high and the eye-blackening horror of the inevitable comedown. Future's music acknowledged that drug addiction isn't that cinematically neat: It's the high and the comedown over and over again.

After London, Future's P.R. staff and I got back into our little dance. Emails, calls, texts, pleadings. Soon, I received word that Future was ready to talk again. It was in Toronto that we actually met, and where it was so cold that the streets had a kind of a permafrost hue. The pavement felt as if it could, at any point, shatter. For a few days, I tagged along with Future and his affable crew. The first order of

business was an interview with a TV station on the 19th floor of a high-end hotel.

The interviewer, a friendly reporter in all black, was drinking a glass of white wine. She showed Future the tattoos on her arm; I couldn't quite see them, but they were apparently inspired by his music. "Oh!" (Continued on Page 79)



5.

'Jolene'

PENTATONIX

Can choir nerds bring harmony to a divided country?

BY AMY PHILLIPS

"A cappella is cool again," declared the Cracker Barrel Twitter account, an unexpected authority on such matters, in October 2015. The occasion was a new sponsorship deal with Pentatonix, the astonishingly popular vocal quintet. Much like Cracker Barrel, Pentatonix is one of those cultural institutions whose existence you could go your whole life not noticing, until you do, when you realize it is *everywhere*. "3x Grammy Award Winning Multi-Platinum Selling Choir Nerds," the group's Twitter bio boasts, and it's true: Over the course of almost six years, Pentatonix has sold more than six million records, put out the first a cappella album to debut at No. 1 on Billboard's Top 200 chart and amassed over two billion YouTube views.

The third of those Grammys, for Best Country Duo/Group Performance, came in February, for



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A Tribe Called Quest in 1990, from left: Ali Shaheed Muhammad, Phife Dawg, Jarobi White and Q-Tip.

a collaboration with Dolly Parton on a new version of her '70s heart-break classic, "Jolene." The world has Cracker Barrel to thank for this team-up: Both Parton and Pentatonix have partnerships with the chain, which brought them together to record "Jolene" as a promotional single. The result sounds like a barbershop quartet singing at an old-timey barn raising. "We're both very family-centric and very wholesome," Kirstin Maldonado, the Pentatonix mezzo-soprano, said in 2015, explaining why the group's image meshes so well with the brand's, "and I think our demographics really integrate well."

Pentatonix's music is indeed relentlessly wholesome — just five voices cooing and trilling and humming cheerily along. There is nothing dangerous or dark or

threatening in their work, which consists mostly of chaste covers of pop hits and Christmas songs. No sex, only kissing. No bad behavior, no cursing and certainly no politics. The five members of Pentatonix, though, represent a rainbow coalition of historically marginalized groups. Maldonado, the group's lone woman, is Hispanic. One of the male lead singers, Mitch Grassi, is openly gay. He and the other male lead, Scott Hoying, have a side-project YouTube series called "Superfruit," which sells tank tops that say "Marriage Is So Gay." Avi Kaplan, the

basso profundo, is Jewish, and Kevin Olusola, the beat-boxer, is black and a practicing Seventh-day Adventist.

This "Sesame Street" version of American harmony makes the group's association with Cracker

Barrel — which has a history of discrimination — particularly fascinating. Despite looking like a United Colors of Benetton ad styled by the Kardashians, the members of Pentatonix sound like the jukebox at a heavily chaperoned sock hop; through them, Cracker Barrel can dip its toes in the waters of inclusion without fearing any backlash. Indeed, if you're looking for criticism of Pentatonix, you're more likely to find it on liberal music websites trashing its "nightmarishly hammy" sound (to quote Rolling Stone) than on conservative sites attacking its politics. Members have appeared on "All Things Considered" and "Fox and Friends," and nobody batted an eye. Could it be that five choir nerds hold the secret to bridging a divided nation? ♦

LENGTH:
2:52

LYRIC:
'The Tribe be the best in they division/ Shaheed Muhammad cut it with precision/Who can come back years later, still hit the shot?'

'We the People ...'

A TRIBE CALLED QUEST

Who makes the protest music?
BY GREG TATE

Of course it would be A Tribe Called Quest who gave the nation's pop body politic its first acidly anthemic counterassault on Donald Trump's anti-immigrant sentiments. This is, after all, the Golden Age vintage hip-hop band with respective Trinidadian-American and Muslim founders in Phife Dawg and Ali Shaheed Muhammad, one half of the original team; the one that gave dap to the plight of Haitian immigrants on its 1990 debut album, "People's Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm"; the group whose very name is a panegyric in praise of the hyphenated American dream. Of course they did it.

Their performance of that snarky resistance song — "We the People...." — at last month's Grammy Awards, alongside their Jamaican-American fellow traveler Busta Rhymes, didn't just split ownership of the whole showcase with

Beyoncé's fertility-goddess spectacular. It had Busta addressing the president by a pungent new name: "Agent Orange." Months earlier, their "Saturday Night Live" debut of the song (and its parent



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project, “We Got It From Here ... Thank You 4 Your Service”) came in the same week the president blustered his way into the Oval Office, lost the popular vote and set off a resistance movement in song and dance and sardonic album titling. That moment made New York rap iconoclasm — and A Tribe Called Quest — matter again in one epic, epochal heartbeat: Who else are you gonna call when the dirty work of radical-oppositional boom-bap needs to be done, live and direct, in irony-redolent rhyme?

By February, A Tribe Called Quest’s Grammy performance was sustaining the same Black Panther- and Public Enemy-powered momentum that Beyoncé brought to last year’s Super Bowl — the same kind in Kendrick Lamar’s own fire-breathing, flame-throwing, plantation-to-penitentiary salvo at *last* year’s Grammys.

To the extent that America’s current protest movement has provoked any pop paeans worthy of Bob Dylan or Curtis Mayfield, they have emerged out of Black Lives Matter — and in remarkably short order. It has been 31 months since “we the people” of Ferguson, and then Baltimore, inspired not just those cities’ urban commandos but a generation of youthful-and-truthful hip-hop and R. & B. standard-bearers. Whether the white alt-rock left will seize this moment’s baton as frankly or as fruitfully remains to be seen.

We need not hold our breath waiting, though. “We the People....” is full of ready-to-rumble pushback. Its lyrics name and gather together all the targeted — Mexicanfolk, Muslimfolk, gayfolk, womenfolk, #BlackLivesMatterfolk — under one force field. And under one intersectional, Queens-bred guerrilla meal plan:

“We don’t believe you ‘cause we the people

Are still here in the rear, ayo, we don’t need you

You in the ‘killing off good young nigga’ mood

When we get hungry we eat the same [expletive] food

The ramen noodle.” ♦



7.

‘One Night’

LIL YACHTY

Rap music fully unmoored from its past.

BY JAMIE LAUREN KEILES

There are two different ways you can keep up with pop. The first is by drifting along with the current, bobbing immersed in the changing of the charts — so lost from any point of reference on the shore that minor fluctuations (the downfall of an air horn, the outflow of a sound) hardly register. From there, in the tide, you don’t ask, “How did pop get here?” because you were with it the whole time. You, most likely, are in high school, or college, or somewhere that music flows like water all around. Pop, in such places, is understood by osmosis.

The rest of us — less lucky — must accept the second system. Somewhere along the way we get busy with work, or prioritize movies, or decide to have kids and look up to find we’ve lost

the thread. We emerge from our hiatus and turn on the radio only to wonder, “How did pop get here?” We have no idea. It is then that we begin to study pop trends by rote — by reading reviews and listening to podcasts, by looking up songs on Shazam in the drugstore, by turning to Google to ask it: “Who is Lil Yachty?”

Before I heard Yachty’s music, I heard that he was awful. I heard he had no flow and couldn’t rap, was a meme and a poseur, wasn’t reping the culture. Wiz Khalifa called his style “mumble rap.” His sound, I heard, was dinky. When I finally relented and listened to “One Night” — Yachty’s top-charting song of last year — nothing I heard could dispel what I’d been told. Flow? Clumsy. Lyrics? Bland. The beat on the track was the inverse of a banger — tinny and thin, compulsively looping, like something churned out with a really cool toy. In a voice that was somehow both droning and singsong, the 19-year-old Atlantan wanly shrugged off commitment. It was an anthem for the player who can’t be tied down, run a thousand times though a Xerox machine. Catchy like a backing track in a commercial, it was sticky for all the texture it lacked. I listened on repeat with car-crash infatuation. It wasn’t good rap by any technical metric — or at least not by any metric I knew — but for some unknown reason, I wanted to like it. Like any pop émigré, I started to study.

The hip-hop establishment had little to offer. Ebro Darden of Hot 97 took to Twitter to whine about Yachty; ’90s production legend Pete Rock posted online,

“He sucks mud on a rainy day!” Yachty, meanwhile, seemed to pay little mind to the genre conventions he’d supposedly betrayed. Of hip-hop forefathers Biggie and Tupac, he told Billboard, “I honestly couldn’t name five songs.” Instead, his influences were Fall Out Boy and Coldplay. He

signed an endorsement deal with Target, alongside the Canadian pop star Carly Rae Jepsen. In Nautica shirts and plastic-beaded braids, he

LENGTH:
4:03

LYRIC:
‘I know you want this for life/Taking pictures with all my ice/
But I can’t have no wife’

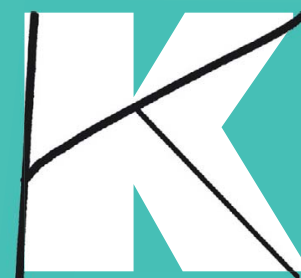


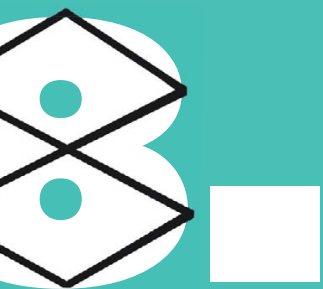


was an ungraceful hybrid of your grandpa and your niece. In the style of Warhol backstage at WrestleMania — awkward and quiet, but nonetheless enthused — he made the rounds, telling press outlets, “I’m not a rapper.” Instead, he claimed he was an *artist*, a brand. As old-schoolers and gatekeepers scratched their heads and wept, Yachty continued to rise through the ranks, buoyed by fans who had no trouble understanding.

His come-up was something straight outta LinkedIn, an origin uncaring toward the rap plot as we know it. Before releasing a single track — before perhaps even rapping a single bar — he spent a summer networking with influencers in New York, befriending the internet cool-teen Luka Sabbat and A\$AP-affiliate-slash-stylist Ian Connor. It wasn’t a mixtape or even SoundCloud that brought “One Night” to fame but instead the track’s appearance in a viral comedy clip on YouTube.

The subsequent music video made a mockery of an older generation’s rap-vid fantasies. What begins as Yachty on a yacht with three women quickly descends into maritime madness — jump-cuts from hammerhead sharks and harpoons, to dress-up in wet suits and other nautical garb, to glitch-art graphics of slow-swimming fish, calling to mind the early days of home computers. It’s a sloppy pastiche of what’s cool right now: a surging nostalgia for the ‘90s, blended with the net-art aesthetic of today, wrapped in the cachet of an Atlanta pedigree. It might all be a gimmick, but it doesn’t feel random. If rap music is founded on a process of layering — autobiography with references and samples — then Yachty does the same for the rap career itself, mixing what’s trending with the right group of friends and tying it together with the loose thread of a sound. If it isn’t good rap, then it’s the perfect kind of music for those of us barely treading water in the zeitgeist, who can’t understand new music by ear. Yachty had to do his research, just like the rest of us. ♦





'REWIND'

She has found her own corner of R.&B.

BY JENNA WORTHAM • PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIK MADIGAN HECK

KELELA





T

he 33-year-old musician Kelela favors the kind of fashion aesthetic that science-fiction films sometimes use to signify characters from the future: gravity-defying materials in iridescent or metallic colors. For a recent rainy night in Strasbourg, the small city in the northeastern corner of France, she strode onstage dressed like a lieutenant in an anime cartoon, in an oversize gray bomber jacket, matching shorts and heels made from white fabric that stretched above her knees. She raised her hands and gave a hard stare to the crowd. “My mission tonight,” she said, “is to show the breadth of R.&B. music. It has influenced every genre, pretty much, so anyone who thinks it is basic or rudimentary has another thing coming.”

There were no whoops, claps or even smiles. The audience remained passive. Kelela likes to keep an eye out for the edges of the crowd, where her core fans (“the queer black and brown weirdos” as she put it to me) usually congregate. But tonight, the scene was homogeneous in a very European way: Women favored striped boatnecks, red lips and messy topknots; the men, zipped-up pullovers and spotless white trainers. Kelela nodded at her D.J., Loric Sih, a sweet-faced boy with bleached blond hair and wire-rimmed Harry Potter glasses, and they dove into her set. True to her word, amid the switchbacks of her feathery falsetto voice, there was no mistaking the roots of classic R.&B. — all set to spacey electronic beats far outside the traditional canon. The room became a sound installation of Kelela’s reverb-y vocals and synthetic ’90s-era Miami bass.

Kelela’s stage was minimally adorned, but her lighting team is adept at creating James Turrell-like lightscapes that drape her figure in rich reds, purples and blues. At one

point, her face and body were illuminated by an electric shade of cyan, while the background remained shaded in dark azure. The effect made Kelela look as ethereal and spectral as the music radiating from the speakers. The handful of times I'd seen her perform in the United States, the audience was rapt for the entire performance — reverent during her atmospheric songs, breaking into exuberant, feverish dance during her fast-paced ones. (Her music can keep the lovesick company in bed just as easily as it can shepherd a party past sunrise.)

But that night the concertgoers remained inscrutable. When she transitioned into a new song — “Blue Light,” the first single from her long-awaited debut album — I pulled out my phone and sent the recording to some friends back home. Some 4,000 miles away, they seemed more excited than the people physically present in the concert hall. Finally, about 30 minutes into her set, Sih began playing “Rewind,” the closest thing Kelela has to a pop song. The audience, charmed at last, succumbed to the irresistible beat and danced along. The moment was buoyant but short-lived: It was her last

number. She thanked the crowd and then bounded offstage.

When she was back in her dressing room, the composure Kelela had projected to the audience quickly dissipated. She stood with her hands on her hips, chewing on her lip. Her boyfriend — a filmmaker named Cieron Magat, with whom she shares an apartment in London — murmured words of reassurance and handed her a cup of homemade ginger tea. “That was one of the worst ones,” she said, sighing and taking off her earrings. Magat told her not to worry, but Kelela wanted to deconstruct the performance.

“The thing I’m always looking for are the eyes, or even the face that’s like, I don’t know what this is but I’m into it,” she said. “But I got nothing.” She peeled her clothes off absent-mindedly and paced around her dressing room. “I was this guy” — she threw her arms up in imitation of the shruggie emoticon — and sighed again. “But it’s unrealistic in this context.”

By context, Kelela meant that she wasn’t the headliner — most people were there to see the main act, the

moody British band the xx. Earlier in the day, while roaming around Strasbourg, I noticed that the posters advertising the show didn’t even mention her name. That night, in the nearly sold-out venue, a space that could hold 4,000 people, only a few attendees were black; her “queer black and brown weirdos” were missing. In the United States, Kelela is part of the vanguard of black

female musicians who make emotional soul, women like Solange, SZA and Syd tha Kyd. The music of these women is aimed squarely at the heart chakra of young black women; it legitimizes as much as it asserts the value of being yourself — even if that self is thought to be a little off-center. Kelela, in particular, explodes the

notion that blackness is monolithic, a single Pantone square instead of untold variations. Her music is geared to a generation that lives for juxtapositions and unexpected arrangements, sonically and visually.

In 2012, Kelela was performing at a show that Solange’s manager happened to see. She asked for a demo and gave the song to Solange, who asked Kelela to come on tour with

her later that year, introducing Kelela to an audience who could appreciate her innovations in R.&B. In October 2013, Kelela released “Cut 4 Me,” an impressive mixtape composed of 13 songs that were initially free online. At the time, Kelela wanted to see how far she could push herself as an artist and play with the boundaries of R.&B. Kelela’s uninhibited experimentation, as well as the rich latticework on songs like “Send Me Out,” impressed critics. Pitchfork gave the collection a rare 8.3 rating out of 10 and said she had “the talent to make herself heard, and the intelligence to get it all together”; Spin called the collection “stunning” and said the singer could “go anywhere from here.” That November, Solange chose two of Kelela’s songs for “Saint Heron,” a compilation album released by Solange’s label of the same name. In 2015, she released a six-song EP called “Hallucinogen.” Her sound on the EP somehow managed to evoke Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, Björk and Donna Summer all at the same time. It felt like a sonic relic of the past unearthed 100 years in the future. Since then, fans have been waiting for her first full-length album, which Kelela expects to release this year.

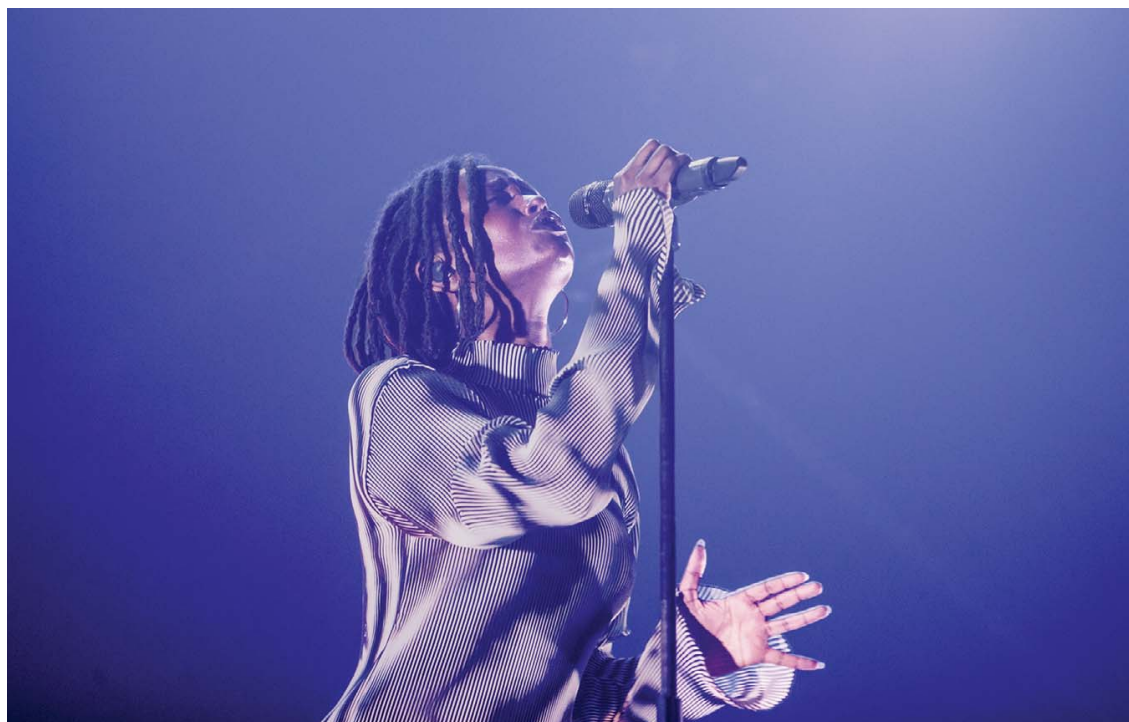
In her dressing room, Kelela folded herself into a pretzel on the couch next to me. A candle burned in the background. She knew it had been an off night, but because she loves performing so much, she was still buzzing from the energy. “The goal,” she explained, “is just — how many people can I put on, just so they can name it, even if they don’t know what it is yet?”

KELELA MIZANEKRISTOS was born in 1983 to Mizanekristos Yohannes and Neghist Girma, students who escaped war-torn Ethiopia and immigrated separately to the United States. She was raised in Gaithersburg, Md. Kelela’s parents introduced her to the violin when she was a child, and she practiced singing along to the radio in her bedroom at night and composing medleys in her head. Her father was fond of Blues Alley, an all-ages jazz supper club in Georgetown frequented by Dizzy Gillespie and

LENGTH:
3:58

LYRIC:
‘I’m still on the
run, you don’t
know where
I hide/I’m
giving you
eyes, but
you misread
the signs’

Kelela performing at the 2016 Sónar festival in Barcelona.



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Sarah Vaughan. He often took Kelela with him, and she fell in love with the culture of music. She listened to Kirk Franklin on the radio and learned to sing in ge'ez, an ancient language used primarily in the Ethiopian church, which she attended with her mother. You can still catch the influence in her voice — the way she turns sounds into sacred geometry, almost unconsciously stairstepping through the vowels and consonants.

In her early to mid 20s, she would go to a Washington bar called 18th Street Lounge for its Sunday-night house sessions. A D.J. named Sam Burns played eclectic soul and deep house music, and after a few drinks, if she heard a bit of music that reminded her of another song, she would jump on the microphone and blend the two in real-time. “I would run to the microphone and figure out a way to sing it. I would create a flip,” she says. “That is where I live.”

Her first boyfriend, Kris Funn, whom she met when she was 19, played the upright bass, and she sat in bars for hours, watching him and his friends play. She joked to me that she was a “jazz wife” but also admitted that she received an unexpected education: She learned to listen to music, to get a feel for it. Eventually the couple broke up, but Funn encouraged Kelela to trust her instincts and not be intimidated by her lack of formal music training.

By that time, Kelela was a student at American University, studying international studies and sociology. “I was the only brown girl, all the time, talking about African politics,” she told me. “I thought I was going to be an academic. In my head, I am supposed to be a college graduate. I wanted to finish. But I was not motivated to sit there and do that paper. I had a lot of resistance.” She felt alienated by the program. She dropped out.

This was in 2006, and synthpop, epitomized by bands like the Knife, was trending. She began recording in a punk house in Washington, a city with a hard-core lineage that included acts like Fugazi and Bad Brains. She thrived in an environment devoid of rules. “What’s so beautiful about punk” (Continued on Page 77)



9.

‘This Girl’

KUNGS VS. COOKIN’ ON 3 BURNERS

An earworm that nearly eluded its audience.

BY LYDIA KIESLING

Last summer I heard a pop song so intoxicating, I became obsessed with hearing it again. I heard it in a store, in a restaurant, blaring from a car full of young people clearly having the time of their lives. I didn’t know enough lyrics to Google them, and I am enough of a Luddite that I don’t have Shaz-

am. I tried to hold the beat in my head, pre-emptively mourning the fact that this transporting jam was going to pass me by. I’m getting old, I thought: This is what it’s going to be like from now on. But one day, Pandora came through. Armed with all the songs I’ve ever purported to enjoy, the app kindly, if creepily, delivered the yearned-for song into my feed.

The song, “This Girl,” is a result of the (at the time) 19-year-old French D.J. and producer Valentin Brunel, alias Kungs, trawling YouTube videos in his bedroom and finding an obscure 2009 soul-revival tune by the Australian band Cookin’ on 3

Burners. Brunel remixed the song, speeding it up into what he calls a “happy house track.” With the aid of Spotify, the song soon became a viral hit, topping charts across the globe and leaving no one more surprised than its respective creators.

Kungs’s remix was conceived on YouTube, and YouTube also contains a record of its charms. The video, which has been viewed over 200 million times and depicts a summer romance on a Greek isle, is followed by hundreds of comments from jubilant global citizens who have finally trapped their earworm. “This Girl” now hovers around No. 20 on the Shazam Hall of Fame, meaning that more than 13 million users of the app were similarly desperate to find it. For nine weeks, it was the most Shazammed song in the world.

What is it about “This Girl”? The rich vocals of Kylie Auldist, the singer for Cookin’ on 3 Burners? The retro, cheerful, almost cloying guitar riff? Cynics might say that Kungs left the heavy lifting to Auldist and her bandmates, but this diminishes Kungs’s inspired additions: his trumpets and his house beat, crucial to the ecstatic danciness of the new version. The result is youthful magic, the aural version of dancing until dawn with a boy you just met. Of smoking cigarettes on a rooftop all hot summer night.

These days, an enterprising 19-year-old can browse YouTube,

find something that catches his fancy, transform it and broadcast it to the world. An algorithm can anticipate my taste so precisely that it serves up the song I’ve been dying to hear. There’s something about the timing: “This Girl” is upbeat and joyful and nostalgic when the news has

been a grim parade. The same year the video’s young lovers frolicked on the Mediterranean, some 5,000 people died trying to cross the same body of water. Our atmosphere is on track to become one long hot summer night. In harrowing times, this earworm asks little and gives a lot. It’s an echo of better times — and one you can dance to. ♦

■ **LENGTH:** 3:15

LYRIC: ‘Money rains from the sky above/ But keep the change cause I’ve got enough.’



10.

‘Make Them Die Slowly (John George Haigh)’

CHURCH OF MISERY

Very good music for very bad feelings.

BY JOHN DARNIELLE

Sometimes you just want to kill somebody, you know? Really end their life: make mourners of their friends and family, make orphans of their children, leave a hole in the world where a person once was. You don’t feel this way all the time — you’re not a monster. But sometimes you do. Maybe this didn’t always happen; maybe you can remember a time when you not only didn’t want to kill anybody but also hoped, moreover, to never even know what it felt like to want such an awful thing. But you were a child then, probably, and poets are always making hay about how you can’t get back to that condition in this world. You’re not a kid anymore, and every once in a while — not every day, except maybe sometimes for several days in a row — you want to kill somebody.

Maybe you don’t. I don’t know. But if you do, when you do, maybe

sometimes it kind of gets away from you, right? Obviously you won't kill this person, because you can't kill them, because you're not that sort of person, and besides, you'd get caught, and you're pretty sure you couldn't hack it in prison. Would you cover your tracks? Try to hide the body? Go into hiding and hear about yourself on the news? Walk through the doors of the police station and turn yourself in? You think about these things when you want to kill somebody. You have the occasional dream about them. They're not pleasant thoughts, and it's not a pleasant dream.

What's your damage? How did you get like this? Brain chemistry? Trauma? Read too many stories about Ozzy Osbourne biting the heads off bats when you were a kid? It doesn't matter. Two things matter: First, you're not going to kill anybody, because you are a decent person who wishes no one any real harm; second, you need to do something a little more creative with your feelings than just pretending they're not there. For some people, that means hitting the gym. For others, it means a stereo with a volume knob.

Heavy metal has been providing people with catharsis for nearly 50 years. There's more to metal than that, of course, which ought to go without saying — not every metal-head harbors some hideous inner sadist. When I listen to death metal, it's not for the splatter-gore violence of its themes but for the breathtaking proficiency and relentless musical curiosity of the musicians who play it: To even get your foot in death metal's door, you have to be awfully good at your instrument. But Church of Misery doesn't play death metal; it plays stoner doom (the band itself prefers "doom," without the modifier), and I don't listen to it for the pleasure of immersion in technical wizardry. I listen to it because of how it makes me feel.

Who's Church of Misery? Chiefly, they're the brainchild of the bassist Tatsu Mikami. They've been putting out records since the late 1990s. They have six studio efforts, numerous EPs and a live album to their credit, and every song on every album except one takes, as

its theme, a known serial killer. (Their first studio recording was made before they settled on their thematic focus and wasn't officially released for years.) Songs indicate their subjects parenthetically: "Düsseldorf Monster (Peter Kürten)," "Shotgun Boogie (James Oliver Huberty)," "Red Ripper Blues (Andrei Chikatilo)." Some of their subjects are widely infamous — Charles Manson, Ted Bundy, the

■ **LENGTH:** 6:25
LYRIC: 'Sick and depraved, defective mind/ Everything I touch, dies! (In acid.)'

Heaven's Gate cult. Others are so obscure that only true crime buffs are likely to recognize their names. Look them up at your peril: These are people whose crimes will give you nightmares. "Make Them Die Slowly" is the second song on the band's latest album, "And Then There Were None . . .," and it is impossibly heavy. It begins with a thudding kick drum all alone, with the central guitar riff ambling in murderously after two bars — a

figure that lurches methodically through three five-note patterns to resolve on three descending chords that land like boulders being dropped on a house. My iTunes play count shows that I listened to it more than I listened to any song in 2016 except for drafts of songs I was writing myself. Scott Carlson of the legendary Repulsion sings it; the 2016 incarnation of the band was essentially a reboot, with Mikami the only original member. Carlson's feel for metal forms is instinctive and inerrant; when he



sings the initial chorus — “I’ll hang you high and drain your blood/sip on the nectar while your bones reduce to sludge” — it’s as if all that stuff about Ozzy had been true: Here’s a guy gleefully recounting obscure, unthinkable real-world crimes as if they were fond memories of his time in varsity football. It’s seductive and irresistible. It has a cowbell. You can bang your head and sing along.

I have spent a fair bit of idle time over the years wondering what it says about me that I want to indulge this mood at least a few times a week for the rest of my life, occasionally at earsplitting volumes in clubs. I don’t think I’m secretly a murderer; I’m a liberal softy. I can’t even eat animals. When I was young, if I heard something that sounded too celebratory of death, it terrified me. I’ll never forget seeing the clip for “Bohemian Rhapsody” on “Don Kirshner’s Rock Concert” when I was very young, maybe 9 years old, up too late. I listened to Freddie Mercury sing the verse about how he’d just killed a man by shooting him point blank in the head — although I thought he was speaking in the third person rather than the vocative, that it was his “mama” who’d just killed a man — and, horrified, I turned off the television. Over time, though, that feeling — the shock, the revulsion — became an object of interior curiosity: What’s this about? How much time can I spend with it? What part of me is it? What does it look like up close?

The cheap answer is something about the cathartic value of transgression, etc., all old hoary stuff I don’t really buy into anymore. The truer answer, for me, is that sometimes you really wanna kill somebody. Naturally, you won’t. You mustn’t. It would be wrong. You try not to do wrong. But if you spend a little time in the presence of a perfect groove contemplating the wrong directly without moralizing about it, you can ride the feeling in safety and go in as deep as you want, emerging later not wanting to kill anybody. When this has become a pattern, it’s an immense release, as addictive as the pellets they would give us every so often if we were rats in labs. ♦

11.

‘BAROK MAIN’

Two composers beyond category.

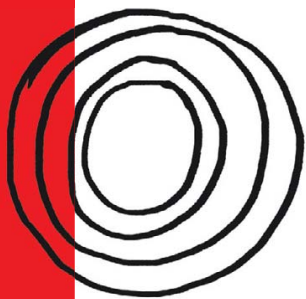
BY RYAN BRADLEY • PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIK MADIGAN HECK

MICA
LEVI
OLIVE
COAT

ER
LES







n a gray winter day in London, the composers Mica Levi and Oliver Coates met in a high-beamed former hat factory — the offices of Levi's manager — and climbed up to a loft space with an excellent stereo system. They had agreed to listen to "Remain Calm," an album of experimental music that, more than a year ago, they improvised over the course of a single day. Each had moved on to new gigs since the album's November release, writing new work for different orchestras around England and Europe, and this was the first time since then that they'd listened to it together. Coates sat on the edge of a couch; Levi took a chair; each looked expectant, borderline anxious.

It had been a busy year. Levi is also a producer and D.J. who sings and plays guitar, most recently in the pop-art trio Micachu and the Shapes. She has written two movie scores; the second, for the biopic "Jackie," was nominated for an Academy Award. Coates has scored films, too, but is better known for his work as a cellist. He contributed to Radiohead's "A Moon Shaped Pool," released last May, and in the same month put out his own "Upstepping," a very danceable record of house music performed almost entirely on his cello.

"Remain Calm" is an odd creation, even by their standards. Its 13 tracks, some less than a minute in length, jump from beat-heavy, densely layered and looped orchestrations to atmospheric and spacey noodlings. Often, Coates's cello seems to emerge, pure and acoustic, out of a stew of sonic burbles. It is a sketchbook in which every figure gestures toward newer, more exciting ideas to come, outlining musical rules (a key, a beat, a melody) one minute only to abandon them in the next.

Before they listened to the record, Coates reached into his backpack and pulled out a coloring book. He showed Levi one of the images he had colored in, a mandala filled with bright blues and greens, thin wisps of gold, bursts of coral pink. Levi leaned in for a closer look, drawing her finger across the page. "Bruv, this is nuts," she said.

"It's what I wish composing was," he said. "The form preordained." Levi nodded in agreement. It was a visual cantus firmus, she said: a fixed melody providing a structure for a limited range of improvisation. They had each studied classical composition: Coates at the Royal Academy of Music, where he received the highest marks in the school's history, Levi at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where, at 21, she was commissioned to compose a piece for the London Philharmonic.

The first song began, Coates playing a solo figure, then Levi's electronic textures trickling in, like an orchestra tuning up. The pair sat in silence, pleased enough but also distracted. A few tracks later, Coates looked up at Levi, who was looking at his mandala. "I'd like for it to be music," he said. It seemed like a familiar conversation. Levi massaged her temples, thinking, listening. "You just get a set of rules," she said. "Each color could be a different pitch." Coates frowned. The idea of "algorithmic music" troubled him. Maybe, Levi said, you set up the rules and then find a way to

break them; color inside the lines, so to speak, and then scribble a face over the results. Coates liked it. The breaking of the rule, he said, is "what makes a moment, musically."

In fact, he added, his coloring was loaded with mistakes already, but the mistakes were what made the thing come together, in a subtle way. He turned the page, exposing the blots where the pen ink bled through to the other side and the sharp lines of the pattern were barely visible. He said they reminded him of one of Levi's works.

Coates and Levi met almost a decade ago. Coates had come to perform student string quartets for a class Levi was taking, and he was struck by her compositions. They were written so well, he said, "that you knew immediately what you needed to do to make them come to life." From then on, the two stayed in touch. Coates sent Levi a video by the electronic producer Daniel Lopatin, also known as Oneohtrix Point Never; Levi sent Coates a mixtape she made with some tracks by Harry Partch, a composer who created new musical scales and built his own instruments.

In 2011, Coates was working on a commission for the London Sinfonietta and suggested a collaboration with Micachu and the Shapes, who were already trying to, in Levi's words, "smudge a whole lot of things together." For the Sinfonietta collaboration, Levi and her bandmates, following in Partch's footsteps, deployed a new instrument she had built with a friend called the chopper — a hollow box with strings on top and a rotating wheel to pluck them, like a turntable that strummed. The live album that resulted, filled with wobbly, off-kilter strings, was called "Chopped and Screwed" (a nod to screw music, the Houston hip-hop style). It landed in the hands of the filmmaker Jonathan Glazer, who was looking for someone to score "Under the Skin," his film about an alien exploring earth in a woman's body. He wanted an experienced composer who had never written music for a movie, someone who would come at the task differently. "I

LENGTH:
3:12

**THE
BREAKING
OF THE
RULE IS
'WHAT
MAKES A
MOMENT,
MUSICALLY.'**

think he wanted someone who was, you know, cheap,” Levi said.

For 10 months, she worked on almost nothing else, worried that if she listened to anything — particularly another soundtrack — she would unintentionally steal from it. She focused instead on the challenge of scoring the emotional development of the film’s unknowable alien, played by Scarlett Johansson. Levi’s stark themes all spring from a dense void, abuzz in discordant strings (including Coates on cello), then synthetic and hollow with muffled drums and distant drones. As the film progresses, though, the music becomes more melodic, reflecting the alien creature’s struggle with humanity, with the untidiness of human emotions. The soundtrack is unsettling, but also strangely empathetic.

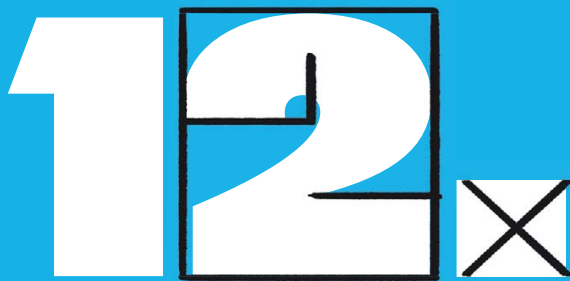
Levi describes much of her work as mixtapes. For “Jackie,” she imagined classy melancholy, loads of strings, the occasional flute, clarinet and piano — the kind of music that Jacqueline Kennedy might listen to, a mixtape for private mourning made for a woman in the center of so much public chaos. The day Levi and Coates recorded “Remain Calm,” Levi arrived with two CD turntables and thumb drives full of samples and premade digital files — all of which, in one way or another, had reminded her of Coates. She was thinking of music not in terms of classical or hip-hop or any other genre, but in terms of people. Some music was Oliver Coates music. Some music was Mica Levi music.

Listening to “Barok Main,” one of the longest tracks on “Remain Calm,” Coates and Levi agreed that it was also probably the most unified piece. “This was a nice peaceful moment, just after lunch,” Coates said, recalling the rainy day they recorded it.

Levi said: “I was thoughtful of what could fit here. Something that wasn’t too thick, too full of information.”

They listened a bit longer.

The track swelled and echoed, and it was hard to know where Coates’s cello stopped and Levi’s sound began. “It’s just happy music making,” Coates said, and they sat, listening silently, waiting for their track to end. ♦

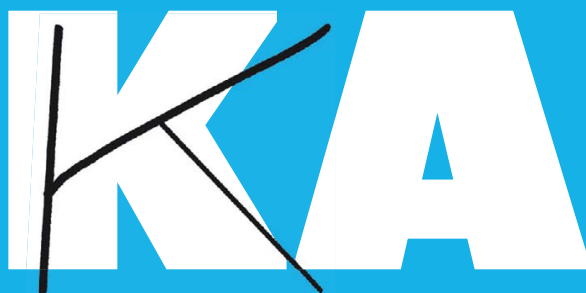


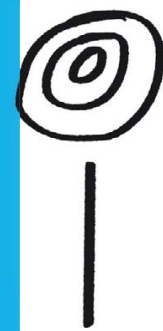
‘MOURN AT NIGHT’

Putting out fires by day, music by night.

BY JODY ROSEN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIK MADIGAN HECK





f you buy a record on brownsvilleka.com, the website of the rapper Ka, it is Ka himself who packs up your purchase and puts it in the mail. Every few days, Ka sits in a study in his home near Prospect Park in Brooklyn and goes through the orders on his site. He was there on a morning not long ago, with a MacBook propped on his knees. “This guy, from California, he bought the whole discography,” Ka said. On the floor were cardboard boxes holding copies of his five full-length albums. He placed five CDs in a padded envelope. “I’ll try to get those out tomorrow,” he said. A message on the website warns: *Please have patience with your order, I don’t go to the post office every day.*

There was a time when Ka took a guerrilla approach to promoting his music. In 2007, he had 1,000 CDs made of his debut album, “Iron Works.” “I gave them to my cousins, my friends. I still had, like, 990 CDs left. So I started giving them away. I’d drive around the city, and if I heard music coming from the next car at a red light — *boom-boom-boom* — I’d say, ‘You like hip-hop?’ Then I’d toss a CD in their window.” By 2012, when Ka released his second album, “Grief Pedigree,” he had a sizable-enough following to make an announcement on Twitter and hold a curbside sale in Greenwich Village. This has become a tradition: On the day that Ka drops a new album, he tweets, turns up on a street corner and sells a few dozen records out of the trunk of his car.

When music writers use the word “indie,” they generally have a certain kind of recording artist in mind: a white bohemian, with a battered guitar and a tricky haircut, who dwells on the distant outskirts of the pop-industrial complex. Ka, whose given name is Kaseem Ryan, doesn’t quite

Declan O'Brien was still in the womb, just thirty-six weeks after conception, when his parents received some devastating news: he had a condition known as Vein of Galen, a rare vascular malformation that affects the blood vessels in the brain. With this condition, the connections in the back of the brain are missing capillaries, which causes high blood pressure. This can result in heart failure at birth or shortly thereafter.

This condition needs to be treated by an experienced neurosurgical team. If treated improperly, the consequences can be catastrophic, including possible death or permanent disability. Luckily for Declan, he was in the hands of one of the most gifted surgeons at Mount Sinai, and in the world.

The day Declan was born, weighing only 6.5 pounds, he was immediately taken into surgery for embolization, a procedure to close off the malformed

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blood vessels. Surgeons used a technique developed at Mount Sinai to snake microcatheters through his umbilical artery and then into the brain, using medical glue to seal the blood vessels. This embolization procedure through the umbilical cord is unique to Mount Sinai and offers earlier and safer access to the patient's brain.

Declan has experienced a few developmental issues, and has to walk with braces; however, he is talking

and doing great. Considering the first day of his life was one of his hardest, every day thereafter has been a beautiful gift. **For you. For life.**

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AND THE FIRST PERSON

RAIN SURGEON.



fit that description, but he may be the platonic ideal of an independent musician in 2017. It would be hard to find a more thoroughgoing D.I.Y. musical enterprise. Ka is the rare rapper who handles both rhymes and beats, writing his lyrics and producing the music that accompanies them. He has directed most of his videos, and he self-releases his music, on his own label. It is not a profitable venture. Ka spends as much as \$15,000 per album and has never broken even. “I make music, but I’m not in the music business,” he says. “It’s my hobby.”

“It’s my hobby” is one of Ka’s mantras. It’s accurate, but also an understatement. Over the past several years, Ka has released some of the most gripping music in any genre. His records offer a poignant, distinctive take on classic New York hip-hop: vivid stories of street life and struggle narrated in virtuosic rhymes over music of bleak beauty. His output has won him a small but passionate fan base and critical raves in Pitchfork and Spin. The magazine *The Fader*, an influential

arbiter of musical cool, proclaimed Ka “New York rap’s greatest living treasure.” Praise has also come from well-known musicians. In 2015, the Los Angeles M.C. Earl Sweatshirt took to Twitter to exult in caps-lock mode: “REAL TALK, I HAVE NO PROBLEM ADMITTING THAT @BrownsvilleKa IS THE BEST RAPPER.”

For Ka to have won even modest recognition is an improbable underdog triumph. He spent much of the 1990s trying to make it as a rapper, quit music altogether and returned a decade later, releasing his solo debut at age 35. Today he is 44. This career trajectory defies one of the seemingly immutable laws of

pop, and of hip-hop in particular, a genre in which the cult of youth and novelty is especially pronounced.

Then there is the matter of Ka’s day job. He is a captain in the New York City Fire Department. It’s a story that has the ring of folklore: One of the great recording artists of the current decade is a musical moonlighter, a middle-aged man who earns his living as the decorated company

A LEGACY OF TRAUMA, A BURDEN THAT’S ALSO A MUSE.

commander of Engine 235 in Bedford-Stuyvesant. “I try to keep my job and music separate,” Ka says. “I never wanted to be ‘The Rapping Captain.’ I try to be a good firefighter. And when I come home, I try to make some dope music.”

LAST AUG. 21, Ka’s photo appeared on the cover of *The New York Post* under a lurid headline: “FLAME THROWER: FDNY Captain moonlights as anti-cop rapper.” The article purported to be an exposé, but the facts of what *The Post* termed Ka’s “double life” have long been known to his Fire Department colleagues and to readers of the music press. Ka put it succinctly: “The

Post don’t like rap. They don’t like firemen. And they don’t like black people. With me, they had all three.”

In fact, Ka’s music bears little resemblance to the “gangsta rap” caricature of tabloid fulminations. In Ka’s songs, crime and violence are omnipresent but deglamorized. It’s here that Ka’s age shows: He raps in the voice of a world-weary O.G., looking back at “the hustle” with regret and dismay, and reckoning with its spiritual toll. Ka’s lyrics are cinematic, training a grit-caked lens on scenes of poverty and desperation. In “No Downtime” (2012), he raps: “I admit, not from environment that let a child flourish/In the street, slim physique, wild courage/Five deep, trying to eat, looking malnourished.”

These stories aren’t fictional. Ka grew up poor, in Brownsville. As a teenager, he drifted into the drug trade, dealing crack and selling firearms. It was a “scary and lonely” existence, Ka says, one that left a legacy of trauma and a wealth of material, a burden that’s also a muse. “This man has experienced so much pain, seen so much death,” says Ka’s wife, Mimi Valdés. “It’s all over his music.”

If Ka is not in the music business, his wife definitively is. Valdés is the former editor in chief of *Vibe*, the music magazine. Today she is chief creative officer for *i am OTHER*, a multimedia company founded by Pharrell Williams, the superstar rapper-singer-producer. Valdés’s professional circle includes some of the world’s most famous musicians. It is conceivable that Ka could trade on his wife’s connections to raise his profile. But a commercial breakthrough is far-fetched, and a prospect for which Ka seems constitutionally ill equipped. He has performed just a few live shows and professes little interest in playing more. He’s a homebody who prefers to sit in a closet-size work space and make records.

Those records are, in the best sense, strange. Critics often call Ka a revivalist of rap’s ’90s golden age. But he is by no means “retro.” He takes the rudiments of ’90s rap and fashions them into an eccentric other thing. His albums have idiosyncratic conceptual frames: “The Night’s

(Continued on Page 66)

Ka in Brooklyn, where he is company commander of Engine 235.

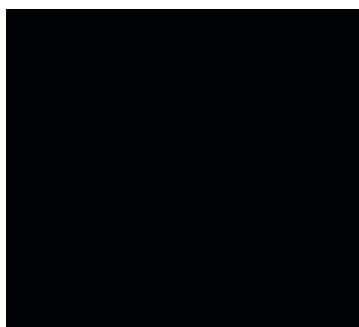




iced coconutmilk mocha macchiato

sumatran coconutmilk
bold espresso
caramel and mocha drizzle





13.

'Hold My Mule'

**SHIRLEY
CAESAR**

When gospel goes viral —
with an abundance of pure joy.
BY GREG HOWARD

It was 29 years ago that the legendary gospel artist Shirley Caesar first recorded the song "Hold My Mule." It was a banger then, and it still is. She has performed it many times, and at least once, 10 years ago, someone filmed her in a church.

About midway through the nine-and-a-half-minute video, the band and the organ, which riff all the way through, fall quiet. Caesar hunches over, gazes into the distance and, playing the role of the song's protagonist, Shouting John — a farmer who has been reprimanded by the deacons at his local church for celebrating too much, dancing too wildly, speaking too loudly (and sometimes in tongues) — enumerates the many blessings God has bestowed on him and his farm. She counts each blessing off on her fingers and raps: "I've got beans, greens, potatoes, tomatoes, lambs, rams, hogs, dogs, chickens, ..."

LENGTH:
9:25

LYRIC:
'I've got
beans, greens,
potatoes,
tomatoes,
lambs, rams,
hogs, dogs,
chickens. ...'

chickens, turkeys, rabbits" — and then she shouts, "you name it!" The band kicks in again, and a slew of sonic histrionics, pyrotechnics and acrobatics follows. But that list is the climax, the moment when Caesar basks in the warmth of God's grace, when she and you both feel closest to him.

This was the moment that stood out to a musician called DJ Suede the Remix God, who just before Thanksgiving took that snippet — just eight seconds in all — and laid it over a trap-style hip-hop beat of his own making. The story of Shouting John and his fussy deacons disappeared, leaving behind nothing but that list of blessings and Caesar's euphoric "you name it!" completely stripped of context.

Suede then offered the beat to the internet, calling it the U Name It Challenge and inviting others to put their own spins on it. The singer

Chris Brown recorded a video dancing to it. Countless other dancers and rappers followed him. The challenge went megaviral. The trick was that the snippet Suede chose had Caesar talking about food — and about giving thanks for that food — convincingly, joyously and at the exact right time of year. Her ecstatic cry made it universal.

The best came a few days before Thanksgiving, when an Atlanta-based rapper named Grey responded to Suede's challenge with a verse of his own. Grey is a vegan, unlike Shouting John, but a quick jaunt through his social media identifies him as every bit the evangelist of his philosophy that Caesar is for Christ. From inside a parked car, Grey unleashed a verse describing the Thanksgiving feast he was preparing for his friends and family: "Jump into the whip and hit Whole Foods early/Get everything to get that soul food working." There would be vegan cornbread, vegan stuffing, "greens with no ham in it," pies whipped up with almond milk, "mac and cheese to collard greens to black-eyed peas/Get a roast of that tofu turkey." Then the sample of Caesar's list, with a little amendment from Grey: He endorsed the "beans, greens, potatoes, tomatoes" part, then noted that he wasn't messing with the "lambs, rams, hogs, dogs." It's almost certainly the best and funniest verse of his life.

While taking a gospel sample and warping it into a trap song not about Christ but about the wonders of soy and fake meat scrubs Caesar's joy of its context, the joy embedded in her voice still translates, is still familiar. I'm not religious. But I grew up going to church, dancing and singing to raucous gospel bands and choirs nearly every Sunday. Once, after a particularly rousing concert, I walked from my seat to the front of the auditorium to be baptized and join the church, only to come to my senses once I got to the altar. I never truly believed in Caesar's God, but I was swept away as so many nonbelievers can be, in flashes of euphoria ignited by family and tofu and trap and everything else that sustains us. ♦

Caesar: Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images.

14.

'A Woman's Face — Reprise (Sonnet 20)'

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT

He soothes the anxieties of life as a gay man.

BY ALEXANDER CHEE

For more than a year now, I have listened to little else in my car other than the albums of Rufus Wainwright. This obsession began when my husband and I bought a car for weekend trips: a 2009 AWD Subaru hatchback with what in retrospect seems like an ancient playback machine, a 5-disc CD player. We pulled all our old CD wallets out to the car, loaded the changer and set off for our first drive. And what had been my self-imposed exile from music came to an end that day.

Sometime between 2009 and 2015, without ever noticing it was happening, I stopped listening to music regularly. I was alienated, in part, by the new ways of listening: I don't like streaming music, or "social" music platforms, my private whims made public. Around the same time, my doctor told me I had mild depression, which would respond to exercise and a change in habits. But this mild depression did not feel mild. I felt trapped at the bottom of a swimming pool, immobilized. Everything I had to do, everything I needed to take care of, was up at the surface, and the soundtrack to this situation was silence.

During one of our first drives, we loaded the changer solely with Rufus Wainwright albums, and I still haven't changed those CDs out. I was always a fan of Wainwright's, but I'm

something more now: His lighthearted way of penetrating my anxieties about gay life became essential. In my year of carbound listening, I played through his songbook over and over. I gained a new appreciation for his extraordinary voice, and the way its nasal timbre humanizes him, as if someone ordinary had been given extraordinary powers, midnote. I am often tricked into trying to sing along, but I'm always outclassed. I never care. Wainwright is a storyteller, and his albums work on my imagination the same way short-story collections do — poetically, dramatically. Singing along with his

secrets became like telling mine to myself, and somehow, this helped me up from the bottom of that pool.

A change of habits, then.

Joan Didion has written of how the ability to make a note "when something came to mind" was the "difference between being able to write and not being able to write" — a sign of life. For me, looking for new music from favorite musicians is also a sign of life. This fall, I finally thought to look for a new Wainwright album. What I found was "Take All My Loves," released early last year. Wainwright adapts nine Shakespearean sonnets into a kind of variety show, with William Shatner; Helena Bonham Carter; Carrie Fisher; Florence Welch; the soprano Anna Prohaska; his sister, Martha Wainwright; the BBC Orchestra; and the Berlin String Section. He is on the cover in full Queen Elizabeth I drag, flowers in his hair. My favorite track is "A Woman's Face — Reprise (Sonnet 20)," which Wainwright first interpreted in 2010 on "All Days Are

**SINGING
ALONG WITH
HIS SECRETS
BECAME LIKE
TELLING MINE
TO MYSELF.**

Nights: Songs for Lulu." That first version is a would-be lover's complaint, sung softly over slow piano; it's elliptical, haunting, slight. A new version on "Take All My Loves" is almost a torch song — teasing, raunchy, openly seductive, as if Wainwright were seated on a piano in a slinky gown and Elizabethan collar, all made up and beckoning.

The poem is, famously, the locus of academic debates over Shakespeare's queerness. His misogyny too. The sonnet is about an impossible love for a young man who the poet claims has all the beauty of a woman, but for the "one thing." I had read it,

but I never really understood it the way I did when I heard Wainwright sing it: It's a refrain many gay men know from waiting out the passion of a man who doesn't "think of himself that way," despite his feelings for you. "If only you were a girl" becomes "You're better than a girl" before either fear or desire wins.

Wainwright knows this territory well. His second album, "Poses," was dedicated to one of these reluctant, not-quite-queer lovers, stories from when Wainwright was the kind of seductive youth the sonnet describes. Now, for the duration of this song, *he* is the reluctant lover.

As a storyteller, Wainwright has always been more of a memoirist than a novelist. He made his reputation singing wise songs of impossible loves and rejection, turning personal pain into public art. Wainwright is now married to Jörn Weisbrodt, an arts impresario, and he has a daughter with his friend Lorca Cohen, a photographer and the daughter of Leonard Cohen. Listening to "A Woman's Face," I wonder if happiness has made him more private, happier telling fictional stories than true ones. His next project is an opera about the Roman emperor Hadrian, who, out of grief at the death of his lover Antinous, created a religion around him.

I intend to be there when it opens, wearing a tuxedo in an opera box — no Subaru this time. I'll try not to sing along. ♦

LENGTH:
3:10

LYRIC:
'A woman's
face with
nature's own
hand painted/
Hast thou,
the master
mistress
of my passion.'



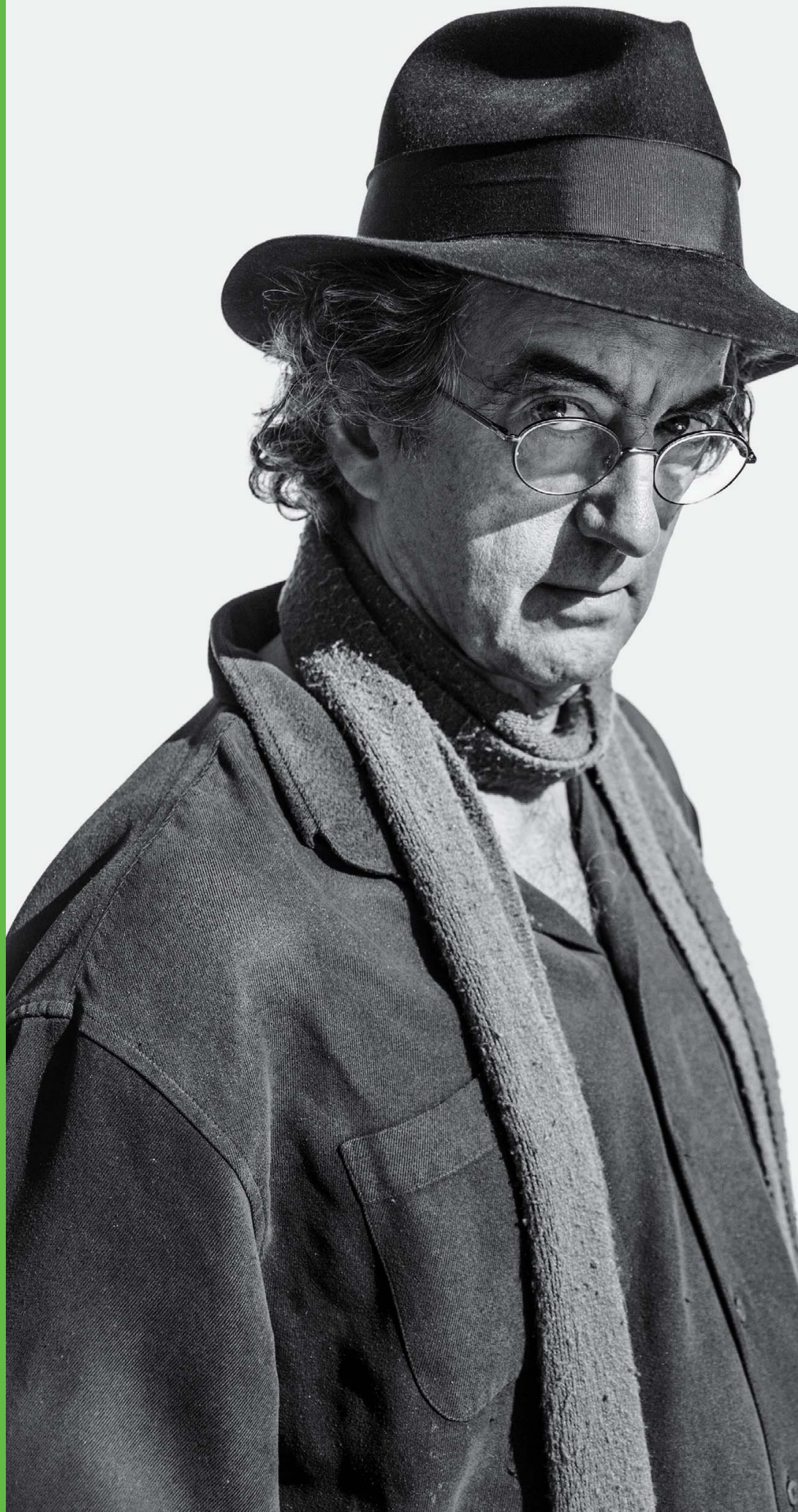
'COPPER CANTEEN'

The danger of being a singer-songwriter.

BY RUTH GRAHAM • PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIK MADIGAN HECK

JAMES
MCMURTY

RY





■ fifteen minutes after finishing an acoustic concert one evening in January, the Texas singer-songwriter James McMurtry was backstage talking about his great-grandfather. The man had lost his own father and grandfather to post-Civil War skirmishes in Missouri, McMurtry said, so he and his wife fled the state. They settled in Denton County, Tex., 40-some miles northwest of the renovated Art Deco theater in Dallas that their great-grandson headlined that night. "They had to time it just right, because if you went West at that time, you could get into more violence because the Comanche were still active," he said. "They farmed there for five or six years, waiting to make sure the Comanche weren't coming back."

The story was a good example of how forces like politics and war can affect regular people's lives, which is a running theme in McMurtry's work. McMurtry, who has released 12 albums over a 28-year career, has a reputation in some quarters as a political songwriter, in part because one of his most popular songs is an angry-lefty anthem. That song, "We Can't Make It Here Anymore," laments that minimum wage "won't pay for a roof, won't pay for a drink," and that the children of the poor are the ones who end up fighting in rich men's wars. Released shortly before the 2004 election, the song swept through an America hollowed out by departed manufacturing jobs and the middle-class stability that went with them. A few years after its release, the critic Robert Christgau named it the best song of the decade.

But McMurtry more often writes about how seemingly distant political concerns nudge his characters' choices and prod at their psyches: the stretched budget of the Veterans Affairs Department, or the birth of a

new national park's consuming the neighbors' land through eminent domain. In "Sixty Acres," the narrator laments that when his grandmother died, he inherited a plot of unpromising farmland while his cousin got "the good land," zoned commercial: "Looks like a Walmart waiting to happen/I mean to tell you it's a pot of gold."

McMurtry's father is the great Texas novelist Larry McMurtry, and his mother, Jo Scott McMurtry, is a former English professor specializing in Shakespeare. McMurtry calls his parents "first-generation-off-the-farm academics." He was raised in secular urban homes and even attended boarding school for a spell. But he dropped out of the University of Arizona, and he remains fluent in his extended family's dialect of ranches, oil fields and Jesus Christ. He has been on tour almost constantly since the late 1980s, and he just takes note of what he sees through the windshield, he said, like banners welcoming home soldiers in small towns.

At an upscale barbecue restaurant near his hotel in Dallas, where we met before his concert, our talk turned to tribalism and anti-intellectualism. His grandparents wanted their children to go to college to get better jobs, he said, but they didn't want them to become intellectuals. Later he referred to the broader middle-American "hatred of anyone who is perceived to be getting a free ride of any kind" and the racism woven into that ethos: "The image of the black welfare queen driving the Cadillac while good white folk drove Oldsmobiles was the boogeyman of the '80s. Now I suppose it's Mexican immigrants getting free health care." Over the

course of an hour, he talked about the military-industrial complex, "embedded" war journalism and the role of charisma in electoral politics. I didn't know whether to believe him when he said he didn't read many books.

McMurtry had ordered black coffee and a plate of fried oysters. In a few hours, he would take the stage alone with his guitar, and in a few weeks, he and his band would leave for a European tour that would carry them from Ireland to Italy, playing 33 nights in a row. McMurtry's music is usually classified as "Amer-

icana"; it's at turns jagged and raucous, and at others deliberative and wistful. Other singers have smoother voices. But a movie star's perfect face can work against his authenticity as an actor, and McMurtry's unassuming vocal style and stage presence bring to the foreground the voices populating his songs.

"There's a danger in being a singer-songwriter," he said. "You're writing a character's point of view, and you've got to sing it yourself. It comes out of your voice, so everybody thinks it's your opinion."

Although I've been listening to him for years, I have begun to think of him as interpreter of the places "out here in the middle," as he puts it one song. He has written about Cheyenne, Wyo.; Tulsa, Okla.; and Wewahitchka, Fla.; about crab fishermen, soldiers and Walmart stockers. His songs tap into resentments about things like coastal attitudes of superiority and political correctness. His narrators are often white men who know the Bible, own guns and give their kids a nip of vodka in their Cherry Coke to get through long road trips. A Texan friend of mine likes to say that McMurtry writes as though he has spent time eavesdropping on conversations in every Dairy Queen in America. Stephen King, who owns a classic-rock station in Maine, has written that he "may be the truest, fiercest songwriter of his generation."

McMurtry has seen things change in rural America over the last few decades, he said, the curdling of patriotism and self-reliance into

LENGTH:
4:38

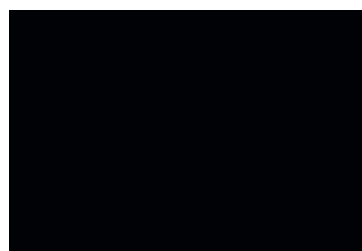
LYRIC:
'We grew up
hard and our
children don't
know what
that means/
We turned into
parents before
we were out
of our teens'

**'EVERYBODY
THINKS
IT'S YOUR
OPINION.'**

something uglier. Gun ownership, for example, has become an identity, or even like a cult. He's a hunter — deer, turkey, wild hogs — and he said gun shows and shops used to be friendly spaces. But now there's a suspicion in the air if "you don't have the right hat or the right haircut." McMurtry himself has both, but he also has the kind of detachment required for skeptical reportage.

"Copper Canteen," the opening track on his 2015 album, "Complicated Game," is the song I've returned to most since Election Day. The narrator is a hunter, a fisherman and a small-business owner. He doesn't go to church, but his wife does. Although retirement is in sight, and he has a pension, he hasn't been able to save as much money as he would like, in part because the store he owns is getting squeezed by "the big boxes out on the bypass."

But like most of McMurtry's best songs, "Copper Canteen" eventually resolves into a portrait of a relationship. The long marriages and old love affairs he favors eschew the hot and cold dramatics of contemporary country music, a world in which you're either swooning over your one true love or bashing in your ex's windshield with a baseball bat. The "Copper Canteen" narrator is singing to his wife; they're grandparents now, reflecting back on what it meant to "grow up hard" in a life that has moved by in a blur: "This life that we craved so little we saved between the grandparents' graves and the grandchildren's toys." Like many McMurtry characters, he sounds nostalgic even though he knows that the past was often bad. The song opens with a bang, or the suggestion of one: "Honey, don't you go yellin' at me while I'm cleaning my gun," he drawls. "I'll wash the blood off the tailgate when deer season's done." Defying Chekhov, the gun never goes off, and the song sweetens — barely — as it moves along. Though that line about the gun got a big laugh when McMurtry played it in Dallas, I still don't know whether to hear it as a joke or a threat, and McMurtry has never been one to offer the easy comfort of a straight answer. ♦



16.

'F.U.B.U.'

SOLANGE

How a song can make its audience feel seen.

BY ANGELA FLOURNOY

A song should not shut a door in a listener's face. Of course, many songs do drive listeners away — through objectionable lyrics, a vocalist's nasal intonation, a grating hook — but generally not on purpose. Still rarer is a song that identifies its audience in explicit, demographic terms. But in the first line of Solange Knowles's song "F.U.B.U.," she welcomes black listeners — "one for us," she proclaims — and she shows white listeners the door.

Once this metaphorical point of entry is closed, an important conversation ensues. "All my niggas in the whole wide world/Made this song to make it all y'all's turn," Knowles sings in the opening chorus. The word "nigga" (along with its "-er" counterpart) is so fraught with negative history that the N.A.A.C.P. held a funeral for it in 2007. Not every black person can hear it in a song and feel the exultation that Knowles intends. Still, words take their own sweet time to die, and right now, "nigga" remains a go-to, often-affectionate phrase in many black circles. In "F.U.B.U." Knowles uses it to draw a line in the sand: If you aren't supposed to say it, then this song isn't for you. "For us," she sings — "this [expletive] is for us."

The song's title references the clothing line of the same name — F.U.B.U., For Us By Us. At its height in the late '90s, F.U.B.U. was synonymous with black cool: I wore it in high school despite the clothes being impractical for my too-tall, too-thin frame. And the song appears on Knowles's recent album, "A Seat at the Table," after an interlude featuring the rapper Master P., whose stories of success as an independent music artist and executive help provide thematic shape to the project. For many of us who were young and black, or young and black and Southern, like Knowles, during the years when he dominated the rap charts, his story has always been inspirational. "If you don't understand my record, you don't understand me, so this is not for you," he says.

Songs that can be described as "black-empowerment music" make up a genre as diverse as that of black music itself. There are the time-tested tracks that focus on pride, like James Brown's "Say It Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud," and Nina Simone's "Young, Gifted and Black." There are anthems that speak to struggle and protest, like Bob Marley's "Get Up Stand Up" and Kendrick Lamar's "Alright." And there are a plethora of doggedly sunny ditties like Nas's "I Can" and Jaheim's "Fabulous." Knowles's "F.U.B.U." hews closer to the first two categories, and a majority of its messages of pride and protest

are nuanced, centering the individual over the collective. She allows that not every black person will relate to the experiences she recounts: "When you feeling all alone/And you can't even be you up in your home/When you even feeling it from your own."

The song pushes past one litmus test for the black-empowerment anthem — that it present itself as made for black listeners, broadly — and tries to reach an even more elusive audience: the black listener who maybe hasn't felt included in such messages before.

Art finds who it finds, and the white gaze lands where it lands.

The more you try to ignore it, the more it seems keen on dissecting you. Knowles is aware of this. The deliberate rejection of white scrutiny is part of a long tradition of black art-making. In his famous 1926 essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," which would serve as the young poet's artistic manifesto, Langston Hughes declared that younger black artists should create "without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter." It's the sort of thing emerging black writers — me included — have to remind themselves when putting pen to paper, lest we succumb to pandering for white attention.

In "F.U.B.U." Knowles doesn't just eschew the white gaze for the sake of creating her art; she performs that rejection in song, to pull her black listeners close. It's a rhetorical invitation for black folks to grab a chair and settle in for real talk about lives like theirs. To her white listeners (who are listening, after all), she offers a tongue-in-cheek indictment as consolation: "Don't feel bad if you can't sing along/Just be glad you got the whole wide world."

The verses in "F.U.B.U." outline microaggressions, but the song isn't "about" microaggression; it's about recognition. "When a nigga tryna board the plane/And they ask you, 'What's your name again?'/Cause they thinking, Yeah, you're all the same," Knowles sings. This is the sonic equivalent of shaking out your hair after long hours of wearing it pulled back and tied down for work, putting on your sweatpants and calling your girlfriend to tell her about the day you had. Between black folks, recounting microaggressions can offer valuable confirmation that you're not crazy, that someone else sees you. It's commiseration, but without the misery, because the slights are both hurtful and numbingly commonplace. Knowles isn't listing racial slights on "F.U.B.U." to educate those who perpetuate them; she does it to foster intimacy with her listeners.

I first heard the song at the gym, on a cheap pair of headphones, so

LENGTH:

5:13

LYRIC:

'Play this song and sing it on your terms /For us, this [expletive] is for us'

the bass on the record wasn't at the forefront as it should have been. The warbled notes of the piano and organ sounded muffled, as if underwater. On even very good headphones, the song's dragged-down pace is reminiscent of screw music — the slow-motion, purposefully warped aesthetic born in Knowles's native Houston. The featured artists are a nod to R.&B. over the past two decades. The-Dream sings in an airy falsetto, making the line "I didn't come back down to earth to die" sound resolute instead of bitter. The relative newcomer BJ the Chicago Kid's delivery — by turns exuberant and plaintive — is like that of a soloist during Sunday praise and worship. The backing vocals by Tweet are a special treat for those of us who sometimes shake our fists at the sky, wondering what ever happened to that singer and her hypnotizing voice.

For all its angst and exasperation, "F.U.B.U." is a party song, just not one for the nightclub. Its measured cadence and dragging bass are perfect for a spontaneous, low-key house party. You might be able to pull off a drawn-out, stylized two-step to "F.U.B.U.," but really it's a rhythm tailored to the simple head-nod — an appropriate move for a song about recognition. Its boisterous horns call to mind the New Orleans second line, those musical parades marched both for celebration and for mourning.

Knowles wrote lyrics for "A Seat at the Table" in New Iberia, La., where her mother's family hails from. Her mother, Tina Lawson, has said that her family was essentially run out of town following a salt-mine collapse involving her father. In the contentious aftermath, a Molotov cocktail was thrown through the window of their home. They didn't go far — less than 300 miles west to Galveston, Tex. Hasty separation leaves a generational longing all the same. It follows that an album created in a town once fled for fear of white violence should include "F.U.B.U.," a song that creates a space where black listeners might feel prized just for being seen. ♦



17.

'Side to Side'

ARIANA GRANDE

Bubble-gum-pop queen turns tongue-in-cheek sex bomb.

BY HAZEL CILLS

When a young pop star outgrows the wholesome, teeny-bopper sound that made her career, we tend to watch the results while peeking through our fingers, terrified of what we'll see. This is how we watched as Christina Aguilera put on her "Dirrty" leather chaps, as Britney Spears stepped out of her "little girl" world on "I'm a Slave 4 U," as Miley Cyrus awkwardly fraternized with a stripper pole at the Teen Choice Awards. What makes these moments so cringeworthy is their self-seriousness, their declaration that to be adult is to be sexy — and to be sexy is to be straight-faced, preferably with a well-oiled body, writhing and pining for male approval.

Ariana Grande, pop music's tiny, adorable diva, could easily have found herself in such a position.

A former Broadway actress and the former star of the Nickelodeon show "Sam & Cat," she has an unabashed theater-kid spirit and a flair for costume — you often find her wearing cat ears and thigh-high vinyl boots. Her songs are brassy, retro numbers that deal with gushy PG-13 love, and she has a tendency to oversell them with the zeal of a collegiate

a cappella singer, her impressive vocal range pushing against the edges of her bubble-gum hits as if trying to pop them entirely. Grande, still straddling the line between child star and adult hitmaker, is in the prime risk group for hypersexed transition songs.

And on "Side to Side," the biggest single from her excellent third album, "Dangerous Woman," she's aiming for something grown-and-sexy. "Side to Side" has her tapping the same watered-down dancehall

trend that fueled songs like Justin Bieber's "Sorry" and Drake's "Controlla," with lyrics about sleeping with a bad secret boyfriend she keeps hidden from her friends. "I've been here all night/I've been here all day/And boy got me walking side to side," she sings.

Walking that way, Grande hinted in an interview last year with MTV — just in case anyone didn't get it — is a result of having too much sex, too vigorously.

It's a huge hit. The song, in which Nicki Minaj coolly raps about riding a bicycle as if it were a male member (or vice versa), as if she were starring in some psychosexual Cronenberg horror film, has more

LENGTH:
3:57

LYRIC:
'I've been here
all night/I've
been here
all day/
And boy got
me walkin'
side to side.'



than 420 million plays on Spotify. But “Side to Side” isn’t exactly sexy. With its coy innuendo, as well as a video that uses SoulCycle-esque bikes as a metaphor for Grande’s sexual workouts, “Side to Side” plays more like a giggly inside joke.

We’re in a golden age for things like this: media made by women, aimed at women, in which sex is explicit, messy and, most important, funny. Listening to “Side to Side,” I’m reminded of Issa Rae’s HBO series “Insecure,” in which Rae’s eyes continually wander to an ex named Daniel, whom her best friend describes as Rae’s Achilles’ heel — except instead of “heel,” she uses a certain nickname for a phallus. On shows like “Broad City” or Amazon’s “Fleabag,” female protagonists dig into their worst and raunchiest sexual impulses. Last year, the Swedish pop star Tove Lo named her record “Lady Wood,” a goofy, equal-opportunity reinvention of stereotypical male arousal.

With its brazenly over-the-top premise, “Side to Side” joins them, beating you to the punch line about Grande’s revamp as Sexy Adult. It doesn’t feel as if it’s designed to stir anyone’s arousal — only their laughter. Does this song sound ridiculous? Well, that’s the point. In a genre that fetishizes sexual passion that lasts for eternity, Grande’s song happily delivers comic realism, with a surprisingly smart wink. ♦



18.

‘Fade’

KANYE WEST

What would black music sound like in an alternate universe?

BY THOMAS
CHATTERTON WILLIAMS

The genius of “Fade,” the penultimate track on Kanye West’s living work of art, “The Life of Pablo,” is evident from the opening lines, a sample from the white Motown group Rare Earth. But it was a half-minute in, at that first unmistakable rip of bass, that I lost my mind. Like many of West’s songs, “Fade” is built around several commingling samples. Its rhythmic backbone is the deceptively simple arrangement from the 1985 classic “Mystery of Love,” by Larry Heard, better known as Mr. Fingers. That track, along with a handful of others, marks a seminal moment in the history of deep house — a rich and criminally neglected chapter in the book of black music.

Today it’s easy to forget that in the early and mid-’80s there existed a window when New York rap, Chicago house and Detroit techno — as well as a slew of other fledgling

genres and subcultures — functioned more or less as equals, each as likely as the next to flounder or thrive. New York won the contest handily, and now hip-hop has so thoroughly subsumed mainstream black culture that it often feels as if earlier artistic forms have either been eradicated or retrofitted to its preferences (see: funk, R.&B. and jazz). House music — much like West himself — is unabashedly black and Chicago-bred, but somewhere along the line, it grew cozy in Europe and came to be seen as catering to white people. And though it has only ever managed to find significant audiences overseas, this transfixing style of minimal electronic dance music was pioneered by Midwestern D.J.s spinning mainly for black and gay audiences looking to “jack” their bodies at Windy City nightclubs like the Muzic Box and the Warehouse (where, under the stewardship of Frankie Knuckles, the style was birthed and named). While trailblazers like Mr. Fingers — a virtuosic multi-instrumentalist — are worshiped in London, Paris and Berlin, they are barely remembered back at home.

“Fade” sets out to correct this. Onto the wide-open surface “Mystery of Love” provides, West spreads

**IT WAS A
HALF-MINUTE
IN, AT
THAT FIRST
RIP OF
BASS, THAT
I LOST
MY MIND.**

out his own sparse raps alongside what grows into an aural smorgasbord of samples, allusions and guest appearances spanning eras and ethnicities — ’90s Nuyorican house, the white rapper/singer Post Malone — a subtle reminder of the outsize influence of black aesthetics on all manner of American and global culture.

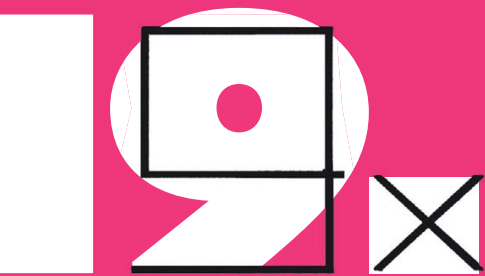
Which is why, as a radio-friendly hit (with an awe-inspiring video to boot), “Fade” feels not only generous but subversive: In the span of a little over three minutes, it gives the lie to simplistic conceptions of musical borders. West has always displayed a rare encyclopedic and intuitive grasp of both mainstream and regional black sounds, from traditional gospel and R.&B. to college-inflected spoken word and even black Greek stepping, not to mention dance, reggae, trap and drill music. He knows that, glimpsed from the proper vantage, these are but facets of the same, constantly shifting whole. I don’t think there is another pop star who could conceive of such a medley, let alone bring it to life in a way that coheres. Yet “Fade” doesn’t just cohere; it functions as a sly and infectious meditation on the variety of formal possibilities of black sound — as invented and interpreted by black people themselves as well as Latinos and white people. It also serves as a bitter-sweet thought experiment: Things could have been otherwise. Imagine, if you will, a world in which Mr. Fingers got his due. ♦

19

C

M

S



'THE TROLLEY SONG'

The counter-diva who brings a comedian's timing and sensibility to jazz.

BY MARGO JEFFERSON • PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIK MADIGAN HECK

CÉCILE
MCLORIN
SALVANT





ow can you tell the singer from the song? On a good day, you can't — so let's start with the singer.

She's Cécile McLorin Salvant, a 27-year-old with an exhilarating command of the jazz vocal tradition, which has long been dominated by women, many of them black. Salvant's parents are French-Guadeloupean and Haitian; she grew up in Miami studying classical music, then moved to Paris and added jazz to her studies. In 2010, she won the Thelonious Monk Institute International Jazz Vocals Competition; three albums later, "For One to Love" won the jazz vocal album of the year at the 2016 Grammy Awards.

I said she's in "command of" the jazz tradition. Better to say she's in communion with it. I like how she listens. I like how she tests herself and learns as she performs. Salvant has a supple, well-trained voice with spot-on pitch. (No vibrato-teases; no meandering warbles passing as melisma.) Her low notes go from husky to full-bodied; her high notes float purely and cleanly. When she scats, it's not an ego trip but a musical game, where notes and syllables get to shape-shift.

Like many young jazz singers, she does the Great American Songbook — the Gershwins, Rodgers and Hart or Hammerstein, Sondheim, Ellington. The risk? Sounding decorous and derivative. Like some other young jazz singers, she does the black vaudeville hits of Bert Williams and Bessie Smith, even some of the exotica that female musicians once tossed out to keep their fans tantalized. Here the risk is archness: the knowing postmodern wink.

I wouldn't be writing about Salvant if she had fallen into either trap. But mainstream success has other traps. And while it has been a long time since jazz was at the center of pop commerce, the star- (or cult-) making machinery still labors to

produce familiar types. Especially for women, and even more especially for black women.

For black women in pop music, the dominant and preferred model remains the Diva. Here's my personal theory. The black diva's obverse is the black matriarch, that forceful mammy, maid or housekeeper, whose mythic reign lasted through a century of film and television. And yes, it's a long way from mammy to diva, but there's one constant. Racially and socially, this figure is considered lower and lesser. Theatrically, then — it's the law of fantasy compensation — she must appear greater. In the old days, that meant she was literally bigger, louder, bossier. Now she's symbolically bigger: more expansive, more intense, more outrageous.

Call the roll of the last half-century, from Patti LaBelle to Fantasia, Jennifer Holliday to Jennifer Hudson. My favorites are Aretha Franklin and Tina Turner because of their contradictions. There's a core reserve, even sadness in Franklin, while Turner channeled her lust-goddess intensity through the dance moves of a gritty pugilist. Beyoncé and Rihanna are the grandest of contemporary divas. Their social, financial and cultural riches are vast; they command global kingdoms. They aren't prey to traditional diva narratives of abuse or self-destruction; they turn all vulnerabilities into victories. Beyoncé is the gracious sovereign, Rihanna the cocky bad girl turned It Girl. But they share a mandate: The Black Diva must flaunt, court and rule.

Jazz divas have tended to have alter egos. Billie Holiday was a laconic wit before she was the Lady with the Gardenia; Sarah Vaughan could counter her Divine One with up-tempo Sassy. Dinah (The Queen) Washington was also a salty good-time gal. I hear their traces in Salvant's singing, and it gives me great pleasure to watch her revise the tropes of black divadom. Don't misunderstand — she's not an anti-diva. I'd call her a counter-diva: the heroine as ebullient comedian.

LENGTH:
3:51

LYRIC:
'It was grand/
Just to stand
with his hand
holding mine/
To the end
of the line.'



Cécile McLorin Salvant at the Chicago Jazz Festival in 2014.

LISTEN TO HER version of "The Trolley Song" from the 1944 hit film "Meet Me In St. Louis." This is a song that could give any singer acute Anxiety of Influence symptoms. It began as Judy Garland's clarion love call, then entered the jazz repertory to be taken up by Sarah Vaughan and Betty Carter. Vaughan's version is speedy and pristinely seductive; Carter's is a daredevil blend of swing and abstract expressionism. Salvant pays homage to all three with touches of loving parody — Garland's girlishness, Vaughan's love for her own silky vibrato,

Carter's near-maniac tempo changes — finding her own interpretation. The train rhythms stop, start and stutter; so does Salvant's voice. Our heroine is thinking and feeling her way, note by note, word by word, into exuberant infatuation, fashioning a romantic-comedy monologue in which the woman

surprises herself with each turn of phrase and tempo.

Salvant, like all counter-divas, constructs her look with care. Hers is gamine glam: Her face is round, her hair close-cropped. She wears big, blocky white glasses — a droll trademark, like Fats Waller's derby; a red fascinator with feathers that look like insect feelers.

The black counter-diva is now making her way into the culture at large. I hear her when the mezzo-soprano Alicia Hall Moran builds a song around nothing but a repeated "Shhhh" or arranges to fuse John Dowland's "Flow My Tears" and Smokey Robinson's "Cruisin'." She's in the mischief that snakes through Corinne Bailey Rae's rueful feathery songs too.

I see her when Tracee Ellis Ross goes goofy on "black-ish." (It's as if she has reclaimed the soubrette wit her mother renounced for lofty grandeur.) I like how Rashida Jones uses cheerful slapstick to counter her sweet-girl prettiness in "Angie



Tribeca.” As Lucca Quinn, the clever lawyer on “The Good Wife” and “The Good Fight,” Cush Jumbo seems to be letting us in on a private joke; a tiny pause, the hint of a double-take, suggests a quizzical “Can I get away with this?” and a gleeful “OMG, I just did.” And won’t it be fun to watch Lupita Nyong’o in the film version of Chimamanda Adiche’s “Americanah”? Freed from period dramas that stretch from slavery to the Empire galaxy, she will bring her talents to a here-and-now comedy of morals and manners.

John Gielgud once said that style is knowing what play you’re in. It’s true for all performers who work with varied traditions and repertoires. And it means that the performer must know what age she is performing in, and why. Along with a merry band of counter-divas, Salvant is thinking hard about what conventions, habits and desires need revising — in her art, and in her audience. ♦



20.

‘Grigio Girls’

LADY GAGA

A boozy toast to friendship.

BY BOBBY FINGER

When Lady Gaga, draped in what looked like the silver uniform for a sport that hadn’t yet been invented, jumped off the roof of NRG Stadium at the Super Bowl this year, she reaped the benefits of a safe-but-exciting performance almost immediately. Fireworks shows and rip-roaring acrobatics and dancing in front of a group of second-rate back-up dancers in capes are the kind of broadly appealing theatrics that generate awe without shock, intrigue without the threat of controversy. Her albums shot to the top of the music charts, her performance was roundly praised by fans and critics and more than 111 million viewers were reminded that her 2009 single “Bad Romance” still bangs.

This wasn’t Lady Gaga’s comeback, as many claimed: She never really left us, nor had she abandoned the music that made her famous.

Two of Gaga’s early albums, “The Fame” (2008) and “Born This Way”

(2011), were bursting at the seams with instantly memorable dance-pop hits. But after her fourth solo album, the both fairly and unfairly maligned “Artpop” (2013), failed to deliver that kind of instant success, Gaga redirected her focus from an ostentatious existence — she wore a dress of raw beef to the 2010 MTV Video Music Awards, after all — to less-bombastic acts of musical bravura that showcased her virtuosic skills as both a singer and a pianist. Last October, she released her much-anticipated fifth album, the deeply personal and country-tinged “Joanne.”

So when she fell to Earth during last month’s Super Bowl and performed the hits that made her famous, fans who thought “Joanne,” with its stripped-down production and abundance of twang, was yet another sign that she had abandoned her old ways were able to breathe a sigh of relief: Gaga’s verve hadn’t gone anywhere. It’s a message she made clear in “Grigio Girls,” a midtempo acoustic bonus track and the album’s best song.

In “Grigio Girls,” Gaga recalls a moment in her early 20s when she was “spiraling out,” only to be saved by the contagious spirit of her 30-something friend Sonja Durham, who was battling breast cancer at the time. “Grigio Girls” is an ode to friendship and singing along to your favorite songs off-key. But through some strange alchemy involving pop-culture references and cheap wine, it manages to do more than just celebrate sisterhood: It’s proof that Gaga is still fundamentally Gaga, whether she’s wrapped in meat or the arm of her recent collaborator, Tony Bennett. Though explicitly about Dunham and the inspirational “tough girl”

persona she shared with Joanne Germanotta (Gaga’s aunt, who died in 1974 and for whom the album is named), “Grigio Girls” becomes something more universal once Gaga’s own voice is joined by the backing harmony. “Sisters never pack up,” the singers reassure us. “We always run back.” ♦

■ **LENGTH:**

3:00

LYRIC:

‘Pinot grigio girls/Pour your heart out/Watch your blues turn gold.’

21

YO

M

21. 

'OOOUUU'

A woman's unabashed appreciation of women.

BY HANNAH GIORGIS • PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIK MADIGAN HECK

YOUNG
M.A.







Y

Young M.A.'s music sounds like summer: It buzzes, bumps, burns. It's hot. "OOOUUU," the Brooklyn artist's single from last May, both soundtracked the sweltering season and cemented its place in party rotations well into the colder months, and well beyond New York. It finds the confident East New York-born newcomer relaxed, but not sedate. Her opening line is "Yo, bro, I think I had too much Hennessy, man" — and M.A. has said she was intentionally "smizz and drizz" (that is, drunk) while recording it, "so it feels authentic." Hennessy is not known for encouraging rest, and M.A. rides the beat with an energy that is at once frenetic and hazy. A slew of clever punch lines invite you to rap alongside her — to feel yourself too. And with spacey, futuristic production from U-Dub of NY Bangers, "OOOUUU" insists you respect its groove by dancing with your whole body. When you hear it in the club, muscle memory takes over.

Like some of the best New York rap that preceded it, the track emboldens. M.A. told the website Genius that the song wasn't modeled after fellow Brooklyn rapper Bobby Shmurda's "Hot Nigga," but the two share similar beats — and "OOOUUU" lends itself perfectly to the "Shmoney Dance" that took over Vine in 2014 and turned Shmurda into a viral star. The city's rappers took note: Less than a year since its release, the track has been remixed by local heavyweights like Nicki Minaj, French Montana, 50 Cent, Jadakiss and Remy Ma.

The original song is full of references to M.A.'s own life in Brooklyn, where she's "in these streets more than Sesame." While the

track's narrative might span only one day, it feels firmly grounded in the habitual: Young M.A. raps what she knows. She's not only a woman rapping but also a masculine-presenting queer woman in an industry that is dominated by heterosexual men. Queer hip-hop artists are hardly new; rappers like Leif, Zebra Katz, Mykki Blanco, Cakes Da Killa and many others have been at the forefront of shifting the genre's landscape in recent years, and rumors of sexual fluidity have always surrounded many of hip-hop's biggest stars, both despite and because of the industry's reputation for homophobia. (Queer women in particular must grapple with intersecting axes of misogyny and homophobia.) Still, M.A. seems refreshing, and quintessentially New York, in her frankness. She is who she is.

The "OOOUUU" punch lines that inspire the most raucous singalongs are those in which she speaks,

openly and matter-of-factly, about sex with another woman. Rapping about women is not the entirety of her catalog, nor is it a gimmick; she simply traffics in the same kind of braggadocio the industry's men are often known for, which is to say she's your average Bed-Stuy stud. M.A.

is seductive — even to women who don't identify as lesbian, queer or bisexual — and she knows it. If M.A.'s contemporary Remy Ma is conceited, M.A. is cocky: "If that's your chick, then why she textin' me?/ Why she keep calling my phone speaking sexually?"

The lines that follow are salacious, but they're not performative. M.A. may be a commanding, bite-her-lip-when-she-looks-in-your-direction queer woman, but her music neither starts nor ends there. What's more significant than M.A.'s queerness is the way she deftly weaves references to sex with women into her music without overstating or explaining them. If you know, you know. And if you don't, you can still enjoy her music — but M.A. isn't going to waste her bars enlightening you. ♦

LENGTH:

3:54

LYRIC:

'They say
I got the juice,
I got the
sauce/These
haters on
my body, shake
'em off'

22.

'Changes'

**CHARLES
BRADLEY**

A '70s rock star's troubles,
and a 68-year-old soul singer's.

BY CHARLES AARON

A chord from a Hammond B3 organ quavers, and Charles Bradley's head snaps up, his eyes locking with the camera. When the woozy accompaniment hits, his deep-creased face wrenches; he shakes his head, places his palms together and gazes Godward. So begins the remarkable video for Bradley's soul rendition of Black Sabbath's 1972 gloom-folk lament "Changes" — no lip-syncing, just the 68-year-old singer in a black turtle-neck against a blank backdrop. For six minutes, as his sculpted rasp wails, Bradley uses his face and hands to silently act out a vast grief, one at which the plain-spoken lyrics, originally written about the Sabbath drummer Bill Ward's breakup with his first wife, only hint. Bradley conceived his version while comforting and reconciling with his dying mother, but even if you didn't know that, his pantomime would still rip you up.

"Changes" was originally the product of rock's early-'70s commercial largess. After three albums spent forging heavy metal in the unglamorous English Midlands, Sabbath was afforded a Bel Air mansion to record its fourth. The house was filled with equipment and enough drugs to get "coked out of our brains every day," as the bassist Geezer Butler recalled in "Black Sabbath: Doom Let Loose," Martin Popoff's illustrated history of the band. One debauched night, the guitarist Tony Iommi wandered over to a grand piano in the manse's ballroom and tapped out the melody of "Changes." Butler wrote the lyrics, and Ozzy Osbourne, the singer, found some gentle nuance in them, despite being in such a drug-freaked state that he was "dreaming there was, like, a tape machine coming into my room and eating me."

When Bradley's guitarist, Tom Brenneck, raised the idea of covering "Changes," he had never heard of Black Sabbath. "But as I was learning the song, my mom was very ill, and she was talking to me a lot, and what she was saying fit the lyrics," he told me. "Before that song, I was just trying to forget about her dying. But how can you forget the deepness of your mom finally telling you about her personal life and what she'd gone through?" Osbourne was so impressed by Bradley's version that he sent an appreciative email.

Bradley's relationship with his mother was deeply fraught. She left her 8-month-old son to move from Gainesville, Fla., to Brooklyn, then sent for him when he was 8. He left at 14, saying she was abusive. Decades later, she begged him to come home to Brooklyn and take care of her. He agreed, reluctantly, but time didn't soften his resentment. It was only when she finally shared the terror she experienced in the Jim Crow South of the 1930s and '40s — and her struggles as a single mother of three in Bed-Stuy — that he was able to see his mother clearly.

By 2011, when Bradley released the first of three top-shelf albums for the Brooklyn label Daptone, he was 62 and badly scarred by his own misfortunes. Even his ensuing, 11th-hour success has

come at a cost: He has been pressured to support family and friends, and because his artistic method demands a deep emotional connection with his material, he has found himself revisiting buried memories of homelessness and violence. Late last year, he underwent a debilitating operation for stomach cancer. When I spoke with him in February, he was making plans to sing again, but his voice was practically a whisper. Still, he eagerly testified about "Changes."

"Oh, my God," he said, "when I heard the middle of the song, where it's, 'It took so long/To realize/That I can still hear/Her last goodbyes,' that really touched my soul, truthfully. I used to think my mom was evil, but we were able to find forgiveness at the end of her life. Now I can go out into the world without animosity or anger and show people the love in my soul." ♦

LENGTH:
5:35

LYRIC:
'Maybe I
should move/
And settle,
two kids and
a swimming
pool/I'm
not brave.'

Five years ago, on a sticky July afternoon, I stood in the kitchen of a friend's apartment, face jammed to an iridescent iPhone screen, poring over Frank Ocean's "coming out letter." What seemed radical then now feels so achingly true to Ocean's uncategorizable spirit: He'd posted a screen shot of a TextEdit file to his personal Tumblr page and, in the echo of a Lucille Clifton or Countee Cullen poem, detailed his summers-long relationship with another man, his first love. Five years later, one passage in it has yet to unhook itself from me: "HUMAN BEINGS SPINNING ON BLACKNESS. ALL WANTING TO BE SEEN, TOUCHED, HEARD, PAID ATTENTION TO."

Whether you have the emotional bandwidth to admit it or not, all of us, at some point in our volatile existence on Earth, want to be acknowledged by another human being — seen, touched, heard and paid attention to, and not just platonically. Maybe those two lines jolted me because I live in an ebb-and-flow of denial about my own romantic relationships. Of the four semi-serious ones I've had, not one has lasted longer than a year. (Once I asked an ex, with whom I'd remained on good terms, to send me a favorite sentence of hers for a collaborative writing project I was working on; maybe half-jokingly, but probably not, she responded with the St. Vincent lyric "Your heart is a strange little orange to peel.") And if music, like all art, should be an exercise in just how honest you are willing to be with yourself, then here are two truths: One is that I have never once known the texture of love — its nirvana-inducing high, its valley of heartbreak. The other is the logical, dead-on explanation for this — I am a coward. I refuse to take my guard down and open up.

Cowardice is also something you innately recognize in another. And on "Seigfried," a moody, astral slow burner from Frank Ocean's "Blonde," I see an ideal palette for Ocean to mask cowardice as love. Has self-confliction ever sounded this divine? Over a bed

23.

'Seigfried'

FRANK OCEAN

On the boldness
and cowardice of love.

BY JASON PARHAM

of drowned-out guitar chords, he sings: “Maybe I’m a fool/To settle for a place with some nice views/Maybe I should move/And settle down, two kids and a swimming pool/I’m not brave.” But it’s the end of the song that finds Ocean sounding his most tormented. “I’d do anything for you,” he croons in the final minute, pausing for a beat and then adding, “in the dark.” He repeats the line five or six times. It’s such a pure exchange, and a beautiful one too. Feelings run up against one another: vulnerability and intimacy, the possibility of love. But there’s also that undercurrent of cowardice. It’s a deep, genuine promise with a built-in provision. I am yours, but only when the lights are low and no one is looking.

Perhaps it’s not a surprising admission in a song that borrows from the singer-songwriter Elliott Smith, himself an effigy of melancholia, who died in 2003. But Ocean has always seemed so *unafraid* to me, both in his personal life and in the way his music emerges from the inside out. I suppose the bravery we see in him is evidenced by his very promise: though cloaked in a haze of emotional discord, it is one offered on his terms (Ocean has insisted on this position of self-authorship and ownership with increasing brazenness ever since the success of his first LP, “Channel Orange”). Maybe he has become more of the man he has always wanted to be in the years since the summer of 2012. I certainly haven’t.

The truth is, many of us are still “spinning on blackness” in our day-to-day lives — at times lost, afraid, uncertain. But tonight, here in the dark and away from everybody else, Ocean’s orchestral psalm is a reminder that you can still be in full control, even if that means retreating to a place you vowed never to return to. It is only with this kind of startling humanness — wading through life’s moral gray — that Ocean could deliver such a promise. Because, really, this isn’t about love or lust; it’s about power. Harness it. Hold it close. And don’t let go. ♦

24.

‘YOUR BEST AMERICAN GIRL’

Growing up wondering if the American dream is for you.

BY JENNY ZHANG • PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIK MADIGAN HECK

MITSK





rowing up in America, I experienced two puberties. The first opened me up to the possibilities of adulthood. The second reinforced that for someone like me — an immigrant, a minority, an Asian-American — there were limits. In this second coming-of-age, I had to contend with the pain of wanting a beautiful white body, not out of some misguided vanity, but because I saw over and over how whiteness conferred an instant legitimacy.

So when the indie musician Mitski Miyawaki titled her fourth studio album “Puberty 2,” I felt an immediate flicker of recognition. I felt another when she released the first single, “Your Best American Girl,” last March. Coming from someone like Mitski, who was born in Japan to a Japanese mother and an American father, the title alone was powerful enough to reopen a wound that had been rotting inside me ever since I came of age as an Asian girl in America: an old hatred for myself, my culture, the way I looked and the way I was raised.

The simple bass line that opens the song should feel familiar to anyone who ever bobbed along with ’90s indie rock while indulging in self-pity (as I most certainly did). Mitski murmurs and sighs and sings about a lover. “If I could, I’d be your little spoon/And kiss your fingers forever more.” Did it mean something to me to hear another Asian-American woman refer to herself in the diminutive? Of course it did, and even more to hear her sing, “But big spoon, you have so much to do/And I have nothing ahead of me.” The guitar and drum beat join in, adding bulk, while Mitski’s voice remains at a steady, low ache, elevating him to the status of a god, unable to

imagine that anything could be off-limits to him: “You’re the sun, you’ve never seen the night.” She denigrates herself again: “Well, I’m not the moon, I’m not even a star.” Then, after the power chords kick in and the chorus lifts off: “Your mother wouldn’t approve of how my mother raised me/But I do, I think I do.”

Mothers have always held such symbolic weight in determining a person’s worth. Your mother tongue, your motherland, your mother’s values — these things can qualify or disqualify you from attaining myriad American dreams: love, fluency, citizenship, legitimacy, acceptance, success, freedom. “You’re an all-American boy,” Mitski sings. “I guess I couldn’t help trying to be your best American girl.”

I wanted to hear Mitski’s story in this song, but I only heard my own. Listening brought me back to the fuzzy ’90s D.I.Y. scene of my adolescence in the suburbs of Long Island, back when no one much questioned why a subculture that saw itself as rebelling against the establishment was quite so dominated by white men. I grew up in that scene, as far as someone like me could — a self-hating Asian kid with strict immigrant parents who wouldn’t let me go over to white

people’s houses for fear that their values (laziness, selfishness, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity) would infect me. My mother had two unshakable beliefs that she tried to drill into me. The first was that I had to study and work twice as hard as my white peers if I wanted to survive in America, and the second was that it was delusional and dangerous to believe I possessed the same freedom white people had to pursue my dreams.

We never actually said “white people”; we used the Chinese term for “American,” *mei guo ren*. But it was clear which Americans

we were referring to. For over a decade, she and my father worked two and sometimes three jobs, on top of night classes, until they saved enough to move us into an upper-middle-class, mostly white neighborhood. “You’ve trapped me,” I used to argue to her in high school. “You

brought me to this place but you won’t let me be a part of it.”

When I told my mother I wanted to be a writer, she reacted as if I had said I wanted to kill myself. She vowed that she would do everything humanly possible to stop me. Compared with how she had behaved as a teenager, I was ungrateful; compared with the white mothers I knew, she was a dictator. At her most cutting, she asked me, “Who’s ever going to read your stories?” I was stumped. I couldn’t say. At that point in my life, kids were still shouting my last name back to me in the hallways as if it were a punch line and asking me if Chinese people really ate dogs. For the first time, it occurred to me that maybe my mother wasn’t trying to stop me so much as she was trying to protect me.

There’s a line in the second verse of “Your Best American Girl”: “You’re the one/You’re all I ever wanted/I think I’ll regret this.” It hints at what so many nonwhite Americans have long suspected: that our desire to be loved may be truly masochistic. It goes unquestioned that the non-American girl would want to assimilate into the

■
LENGTH:
3:32

LYRIC:
‘Your mother
wouldn’t
approve/Of
how my mother
raised me/
But I do, I
think I do.’

**MY MOTHER
BELIEVED
THAT BEING
AN OUTSIDER
HERE WAS
A FINER FATE
AND HOME
THAN ANY
OTHER SHE
COULD
HAVE HAD.**



all-American boy's world. But she cannot. That world is not for her.

Racism thrives when the people being harmed by it blame themselves and one another. As a teenager, I blamed my parents for failing to secure me admission into whiteness, which I was certain was a prerequisite to being loved. I was mad at *them*, not at the cruelty of the American dream or the ways in which white supremacy had warped each of us. My privileged upbringing and education and linguistic fluency gave me such proximity to whiteness that it stung all the more to still find myself outside of it. My mother, on the other hand, not only accepted that she would always be an outsider in this country but also believed it to be a finer fate and home than any other she could have had.

As I grow older, I find myself trying to turn to her more, to ask the questions I never asked when I was too busy feeling sorry for myself: why she came here, what it was like to uproot a life and move across the world, whether it was hard to raise me here. Does Mitski's narrator really approve of how her mother raised her? It's unclear, but you can hear in her voice just how much she wants to. ♦



25.

'Bad and Boujee'

MIGOS

Raindrop. Drop top. Is rap music the new punk rock?

BY NAOMI ZEICHNER

Ever since the election in November, I've gone out more and stayed out later. This doesn't feel glamorous or especially healthy. People who go to clubs regularly are usually there to work — whether they make or manage or write about music or just labor to look great. You spend more money than you have and try not to think about it, because late at night, positive energy is the most valuable currency. If anything made the hangover the next morning worth the trouble, it was Migos's "Bad and Boujee," which dominated parties of all kinds this freakishly warm winter.

The Atlanta rap trio — made up of the rappers Quavo, Offset and Takeoff — have been around for years, but "Bad and Boujee" represents their most significant foray into the mainstream, and it's still a slightly awkward fit. For a recent music-video shoot, they wore heavy-metal tees and studded leather; Quavo's jacket was painted with the skull logo of the Misfits. This is an increasingly common trope in rap these days; many hip-hop artists insist they are rock stars to signal that they are

at the center of today's counter-culture — which is true. The trio records constantly and has worked the live circuit hard. First the rappers conquered Atlanta's strip-club scene, then the V.I.P. booths of the surrounding states and then the money of corporations. On their recent album "Culture," Quavo reflects on their lifestyle: "All this pain, we can live through it. It's called success."

"Culture" triumphed on the back of "Bad and Boujee," which hit No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart in January after months of gestation, thanks in part to internet memes that parroted back its most memorable parts. Migos is known for building songs around catchy lines, and "Bad and Boujee" is expertly crammed with them, from its opening preamble to its abstract poetic "raindrop, drop top" hook and the five ecstatic *woos* that announce the beginning of Offset's verse. The song is nearly six minutes long, and these noises are like souvenirs collected by everyone who has traveled through it, a trip that usually happens at the pinnacle of a night out, when the dance floor is packed and the women in the crowd are ready. "You can just tell," one D.J. friend said, when I asked how he decides when to play it. "It's almost as if someone whispers in your ear, 'It's time.'"

With all its parts to latch onto, "Bad and Boujee" draws people together. When its bass shakes, people do, too; you could cut the music off and everyone would still be yelling in unison. Surrounded by that kind of collective precision, you might find it difficult not to feel less alone. If Migos has to pose in punk-rock outfits to be recognized as a voice for its generation, at least it's an authentic pose: The punks I know love their music deeply. Whether they meant to or not, with "Bad and Boujee," Migos created a space of refuge for people who needed a break and were willing to work for it. The song offered a sanctuary: Settle in, stay a while, belong here for as long as you need. ♦

LENGTH:
5:43

LYRIC:
'Still be playin'
with pots and
pans, call
me Quavo
Ratatouille.'

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(Continued from Page 44)

Gambit" (2013) is full of chess imagery; "Days With Dr. Yen Lo" (2015), a collaboration with the producer Preservation, is an elaborate gloss on the novel "The Manchurian Candidate."

But it is the sound, the vibe, that sets Ka's music apart. His songs are unnervingly quiet and still; they hold a listener in thrall because they hold so much back. Ka's beats do not boom, they slither and slink and creep. Often the songs discard drums altogether, opening vast spaces that are filled by samples in brooding minor keys. The most arresting sound is Ka's voice, a guttural rasp that sometimes dips into a whisper. It is an unshakable voice of experience, delivering hard-boiled tales and hard-won wisdom.

"Mourn at Night," from the 2016 album "Honor Killed the Samurai," is a typical Ka mood piece — a rap-noir, burnished to lustrous dark hue. The song's title establishes the terms: The mood is elegiac, the setting nocturnal. "Mourn at Night" has more of a beat than many Ka songs, which is not to say that it has much of one. A snare drum knocks out a steady pulse, like the sound of an unseen man's footfalls trailing down a low-lit street, or a time bomb ticking to an explosion. The music is nudged forward by guitar and keyboard arpeggios, which chime and toll behind a somber refrain: "He gone/ We mourn at night." In the final verse, the action erupts: Gunfire blasts out of the shadows, strafing a street corner crowded with young drug dealers.

On the block with the rock
Up nights, dribbling
Time spent getting bent
Hard to be upright citizen
It's more than troubling
Same corners are bubbling
The pawns are huddling
Then all of a sudden it's
Pop, pop, pop

Ka excels at this kind of writing, brisk storytelling that unfolds in a pileup of rhymes and puns. What you won't find much of on his records is the meat-and-potatoes of rap: trash talk. "What do I have to brag about?" Ka says. "I ain't winning. I'm a working man, with a blue-collar job. I'm running into burning buildings for a living. So I speak about the things that I did, the things I pray I never have to do again. How do I finish my life in grace? That's what I rap about."

On those occasions when Ka does slip in a mild boast, it's about his skills as an M.C. In "Mourn at Night" he permits himself one such moment, the testimony of a bootstrapper who has survived untold trials to ply his trade — as he would have it, his hobby — in the soundproof booth of a recording studio. "We was born in the thorns, few arose," Ka raps. "Once in town's noose/Now in soundproofs/Pursuing goals." ♦

SPRING PREVIEW



This spring is already promising to be a strong season for the luxury residential real estate market, with high-profile new developments taking shape in Manhattan, Atlanta and South Florida.

WATERLINE SQUARE

Built around a new landscaped park where Midtown Manhattan meets the Upper West Side, Waterline Square is the final piece of the 25-year Riverside South master plan of a total of 19 residential towers along 77 acres of waterfront land, first approved in 1992, that runs from 72nd to 59th Street along Riverside Boulevard and the Hudson River. The emerging three-building development will offer more than 100,000 square feet of sports, leisure and lifestyle amenities across nearly five acres, three of which will be landscaped park and open spaces. The idea is to connect parks and open spaces to the adjacent Hudson River Greenway, adding tree groves, a great lawn, walking paths, a playground, fountains and innovative water features.

The southernmost portion of that master plan, located between 59th and 61st Streets from the Hudson River to West End Avenue, was rezoned in 2010 and called Riverside Center. After purchasing the three sites in 2015, GID Development Group retained three of the world's most accomplished architects — Richard Meier & Partners Architects, Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates, Rafael Viñoly Architects — to each design one of Waterline Square's three condominium towers, all with views of the surrounding parks, river and city skyline. GID has also retained three world-class interior design firms, the first led by Champalimaud & Associates

for One Waterline Square, the second by Yabu Pushelberg for Two Waterline Square and the third by Groves & Co. for Three Waterline Square. A large portion of the amenities for the development are designed by Rockwell Group.

The three buildings comprise 2.1 million gross square feet, with development costs reaching \$2.3 billion. The bottom two-thirds of the towers will be rental units, with a total of 263 condominium residences on the upper third. Each tower will have a private set of condo amenities with an outdoor terrace space, a resident lounge, outdoor terrace and private dining, with views of the park, river and the city. Sales for the condominium units, ranging from one- to five-bedroom layouts, are scheduled for later this spring.

"By any measure, this ranks among the most ambitious master plans ever built in New York," said James Linsley, president of GID Development Group. "We are building all three simultaneously, and that was very intentional. We are literally creating a place, and we wanted to deliver that place all at once, so that residents can move into a cohesive, completed neighborhood on Day One. We have aligned ourselves with what we think are the best firms in the world to help us craft a new authentic New York City neighborhood. We talked to more than 20 world-famous architects from around the globe, and decided the appropriate path was not simply to choose a 'starchitect' to help us design an attractive sculpture in the sky. We cared more deeply about how that sculpture met the ground, and how it interacted with the residents at the street level. More than just creating square footage, but creating a real New York neighborhood, we chose the best architects and designers who also happened to be New Yorkers, and who understand the dynamic of what a New York place is all about."

Construction completion is anticipated for 2019 for all three buildings, with first occupancy late next year. For more information, call 212-586-8333 or visit waterlinesquare.com.

LEFT: Waterline Square in Riverside South will comprise three condominium towers, each designed by a different world-class architect.

Rendering: Noë & Associates with The Boundary

ONE WEST END

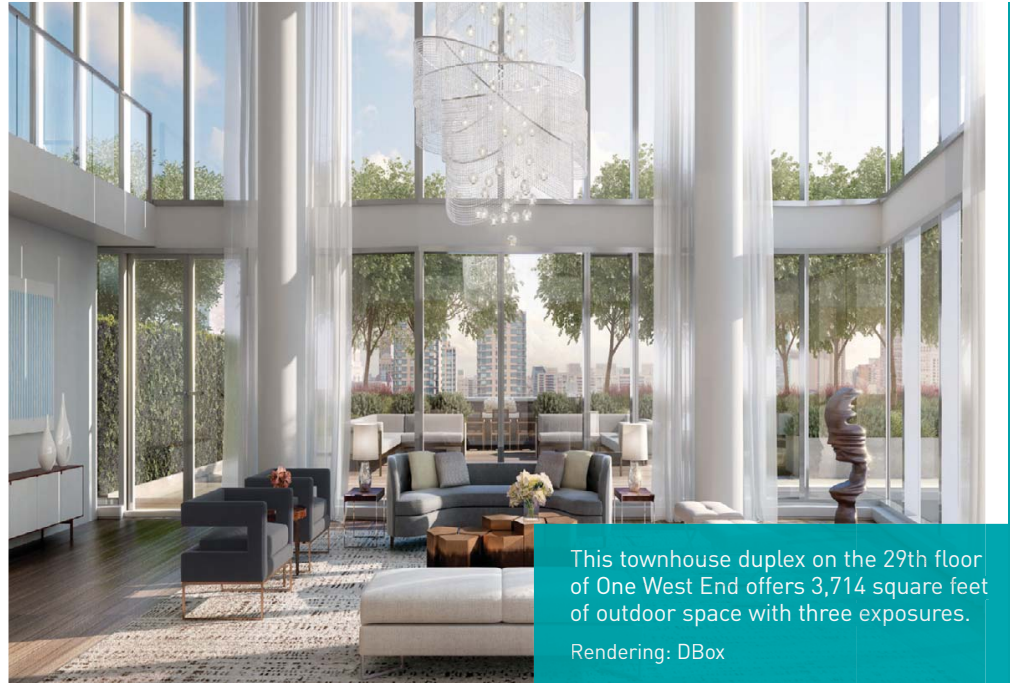
Located close to the Hudson River on the northwest corner of 59th Street and West End Avenue on Manhattan's far West Side, One West End is the first and tallest condominium to come to market within the rising new neighborhood of Riverside Center. Developed by Elad Group and Silverstein Properties, the project serves as an anchor to the emerging Riverside Center master plan that is starting to take shape in what is one of the last areas of prime real estate in Manhattan to be developed.

The 42-story building, designed by Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects, will command an entire city block as the southern gateway to Riverside Center, which in addition to 246 condominium apartments will include a culinary marketplace destination, along with high-end retail and offices. With the bottom two-thirds of the building largely sold, the residences with the best river and city views are now being released.

One of the most specular residences, with both river and city views, is a four-bedroom townhouse duplex on the 29th floor offering 3,714 square feet of outdoor space with three exposures. Priced at \$19.5 million, the 5,371-square-foot residence features seven-and-a-half-inch-wide walnut plank flooring, over 11-foot ceilings, custom eat-in Scavolini kitchens designed by Jeffrey Beers International and a grand corner great room offering picturesque city views.

The building's public spaces and amenities have been designed for year-round entertaining, both indoors and out — with more than 20,000 square feet of indoor amenities and an additional 12,000 square feet outdoors. The amenities and services will be curated and managed by LIVunLtd of Abigail Michaels Concierge, with a full-time director of resident experience, stationed on the property, to work with residents to plan leisure activities, special events and wellness offerings at the fitness center and 75-foot pool, the living room (complete with a gas fireplace overlooking the terrace), dining room/chef's kitchen, playroom, media and game room.

"Hospitality, with Jeffrey Beers on board as one of the world's top hotel designers, is our focus, and we are working closely with him to bring a 'curbside-to-pillow' experience that you would expect to find at a major resort," said Samantha Sax, executive vice president of sales and marketing for Elad Group. "Our concierge service is more



This townhouse duplex on the 29th floor of One West End offers 3,714 square feet of outdoor space with three exposures.

Rendering: DBox

than just making restaurant reservations or scheduling a massage. We will be assisting with day care and personal chef services — since we have a catering kitchen — as well as wellness classes, private training, travel arrangements, and group and individual classes on an à la carte basis, like yoga or Pilates. The director of residential experience will work with the owners personally on a one-on-one basis to develop programming that the residents really want, from wine and cheese tastings and musical performances to book clubs, body sculpting, nutrition courses and film screenings. It is about a truly personalized lifestyle experience, where residents can feel like they live at their own country club or hotel."

The building is currently about 70 percent sold, with only three- and four-bedroom floor plans, priced between \$4.8 million to more than \$19 million, remaining. Closings will begin later this spring. For additional information, contact the Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group at 212-757-0059, or visit 1WestEnd.com.

THE ENCORE

On the heels of its successful development of Hawthorn Park, Glenwood Management is in the final stages of leasing The Encore, a 48-story luxury rental development in Manhattan's Lincoln Square neighborhood. Located at 175 West 60th Street, the 256-unit property features spacious studio, one- and two-bedroom homes with nine-foot ceilings, an indoor rooftop pool and views from many apartments of Central Park, the Hudson River, the Manhattan skyline and beyond.

The residents' lounge and fitness center are already open, as is the children's playroom playfully decorated like a barn. The rooftop pool is scheduled to open later this month. Residents already share 24-hour white-glove doorman service, plus three lobby areas designed by John Saladino and furnished with Tibetan rugs, Tudor gold detailing, southern vein marble, white oak coffered ceilings and French limestone walls. Services include building-wide wireless high-speed internet access, dry-cleaning valet and maid service.

Designed by Stephen B. Jacobs Group, The Encore features sustainable bamboo flooring; floor-to-ceiling windows; full-sized vented washer/dryers; and abundant closet space. The open-concept chef's kitchens are outfitted with Italian white glass cabinetry by Scavolini, Jet Mist granite countertops with mosaic tile backsplashes and GE Café Series Energy Star appliances, including a five-burner gas range stove with double ovens and counter-depth, glass-clad refrigerators. Each of the residences includes Insinkerator garbage disposals and instant hot water appliances. With a building-wide water filtration system, the building is designed for LEED certification.

"This is a luxury rental building that brings a true condo level of finish to renters in a prime location near Lincoln Center in Manhattan's Upper West Side, steps from

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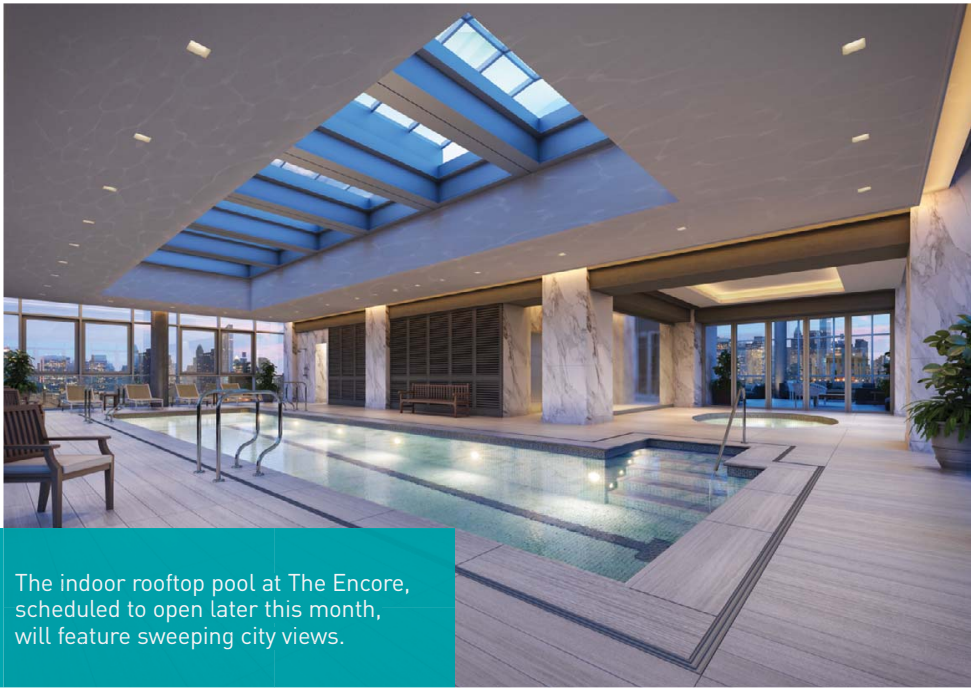
THE RITZ-CARLTON RESIDENCES, MIAMI BEACH

Located in a residential neighborhood on the shores of Surprise Lake, The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Miami Beach, is a truly unique luxury residential development on more than seven acres in mid-Miami Beach. As Italian modernist Piero Lissoni's first full-scale architectural master plan in the United States, The Residences comprise 111 condominiums, 15 stand-alone villas and a limited collection of penthouses (five in total), with 60 unique floor plans for one- to five-bedroom homes that range in size from 1,922 to more than 10,000 square feet. Each contain Boffi kitchens, oversized stone countertops, Gaggenau appliances and Boffi his-and-hers bathrooms. Many of the units have their own private pools and outdoor summer kitchens on their private terraces.

The penthouse collection includes a stunning \$40 million rooftop residence, a combination unit with eight bedrooms and 10 bathrooms, all designed by Lissoni. Ceilings range from nine-feet-eight inches to more than 13 feet, with expansive terraces, two swimming pools with hot tubs— one for sunrise and the other for sunset — along with two private plunge pools off the master bedrooms, separate his-and-hers studies, private wine room and a hammam spa. There is more exterior space (13,000 square feet) than interior (12,300 square feet), for a grand total of 25,300 square feet of Miami indoor/outdoor living.

Besides the expansive infinity-edge pool with waterfall cabanas, clubroom, virtual golf, fitness center and spa and treatment suites, there is also a restaurant and an on-site 36-slip marina. Some of the more creative amenities include a meditation garden, indoor and outdoor yoga studios, on-site captained VanDutch 40 yacht and what is thought to be the world's first residential art studio. A private cinema-style screening room, a half-acre rooftop pool deck with private cabanas, pet grooming facilities, car wash facilities, and a waterfront bar and social room complete the comprehensive amenity package.

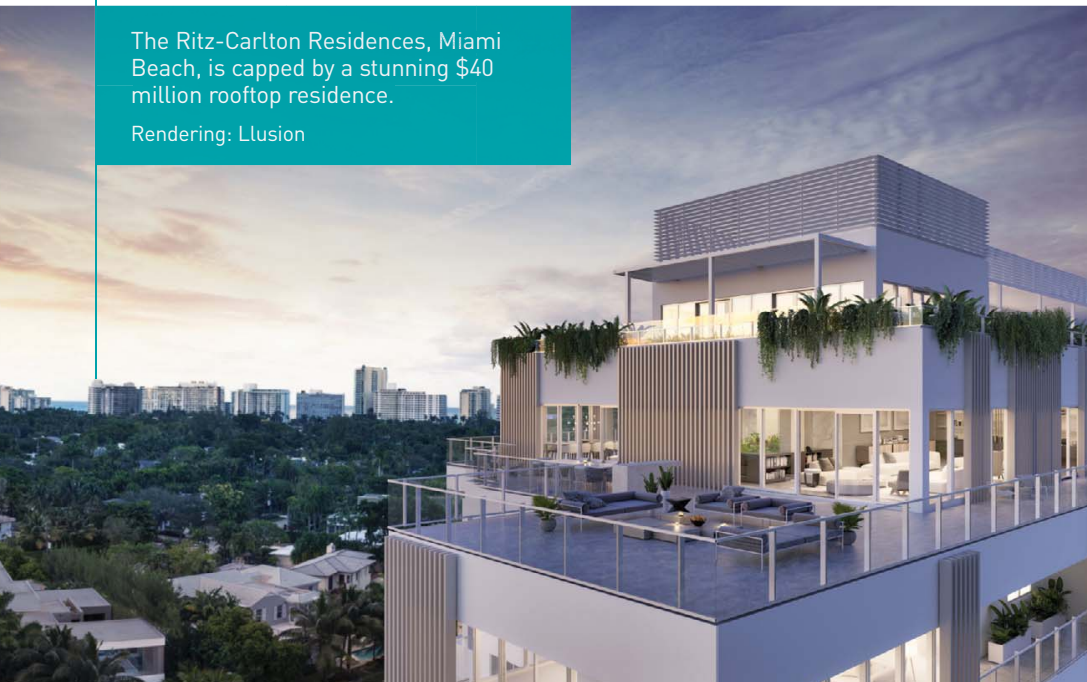
"This is the most central residential location in Miami Beach — minutes away from wherever you want to go — but as soon as you enter this residential neighborhood, you feel you are miles away," explained Allison Greenfield, partner at Lionheart Capital, the complex's developer. "It can get hectic in South Beach, and the last thing you want to do is live in mayhem. Miami Beach is a small island, but there are areas like this one that



The indoor rooftop pool at The Encore, scheduled to open later this month, will feature sweeping city views.

The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Miami Beach, is capped by a stunning \$40 million rooftop residence.

Rendering: Llusion



Columbus Circle, Central Park, Riverside Park and Jazz at Lincoln Center," said Nancy Albertson, director of leasing for The Encore. "It is an ideal location for a luxury rental building, which so many people prefer nowadays. Even longtime condo owners in the city have sold their properties to rent here, simply because they know they find the quality they are looking for, and because they know that Glenwood Management is known for service. And renters new to the city who like to 'rent the neighborhood' before they buy choose us instead because of our location close to Midtown, and the views out

their windows and from the spectacular rooftop pool. They can even see the cruise ships coming in, and the planes landing in LaGuardia."

Glenwood owns and operates many high-end rental apartment buildings throughout Manhattan, including Hawthorn Park, Barclay Tower, Emerald Green, Crystal Green, Paramount Tower, The Britany, The Grand Tier and The Pavilion. The Encore's on-site leasing office is located at 175 West 60th Street, with current pricing ranging from \$3,500 to \$9,200 per month for studio, one- and two-bedroom floor plans. For more information about available rental units, call 888-304-7222 or visit encoreapartments.nyc.

are yet to be discovered, and the residents here want to keep it that way. There is nothing else like it in Miami Beach.”

The Residences, located at 4701 North Meridian Avenue in Miami Beach, are priced from \$2 million to \$40 million. For more information, call 305-548-8410 or visit TheResidencesMiamiBeach.com.

50 UNITED NATIONS PLAZA

The first residential tower in the United States designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Norman Foster of London-based Foster + Partners is now about two-thirds sold. The 43-story building, located near the East River adjacent to Dag Hammarskjold Plaza at First Avenue and 46th Street on Manhattan's East Side, has only 88 residences, each with its own designated parking spot in the lower level.

Developed by Zeckendorf Development and Global Holdings, the unusually large interior layouts, ranging from one- to seven-bedrooms, include seven grand penthouses. One of the penthouses, a duplex, comes with its own infinity-edge pool and occupies the entire 42nd and 43rd floors. Highlights of the duplex include the 10,000-pound handcrafted stainless steel staircase, and a living room that spans nearly 75 feet in length, affording sweeping views of the East River, U.N. Secretariat, and the Empire State and Chrysler Buildings.

“We feel we have created a trade-up building in the Upper East Side in terms of luxury,” suggested Jill Mangone, director of sales for 50 United Nations Plaza. “We are the largest building in the area with the fewest number of units — 88 in all. Our buyers understand that we offer very spacious and gracious layouts, and now that the building is finished, our new buyers can see the views through Norman Foster’s unique bay windows in a completed building, with totally finished apartments. They can touch and feel how solid the construction is, and see how well planned and how well executed the final product actually is.”

The bay windows, unified by a delicate horizontal grid of stainless steel tubes that wrap around the building in all the residences, are a key part of Foster’s design. “Thanks to



The Duplex Penthouse at 50 United Nations Plaza has its own infinity-edge pool.

Photo: Paul Warchol



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Foster's design, prospective buyers soon fall in love with the light and air, and great views, from every apartment," she added. "Even our smallest apartments have beautiful, open views with large, deep bay windows that frame the views in a dramatic way."

The building's luxury spa incorporates a 75-foot pool, and has been called one of the most spectacular pools in the city. The other highlights include the 20-foot-tall water wall and the circular fireplace in the lobby, a comprehensive fitness center, managed by The Wright Fit, and a 10,000-square-foot private gated motor court protected by a seven-foot-high hedge wall that encircles the entire building.

The motor court, set within the wider context of the United Nations Sculpture Garden and surrounding parks and double-height lobby wrapped in glass on three sides, sets the tone for the building. "When you enter from this private motor court and landscaped garden, you are greeted by a monumental water wall, a blackened steel open fire place and a rich palette of claret-colored marble. Visitors and guests cannot help but be struck by the impressiveness of it all."

Prices start at \$2.2 million, and range up to \$70 million for the Duplex Penthouse. For more information, visit 50UNP.com or call 212-906-0550.

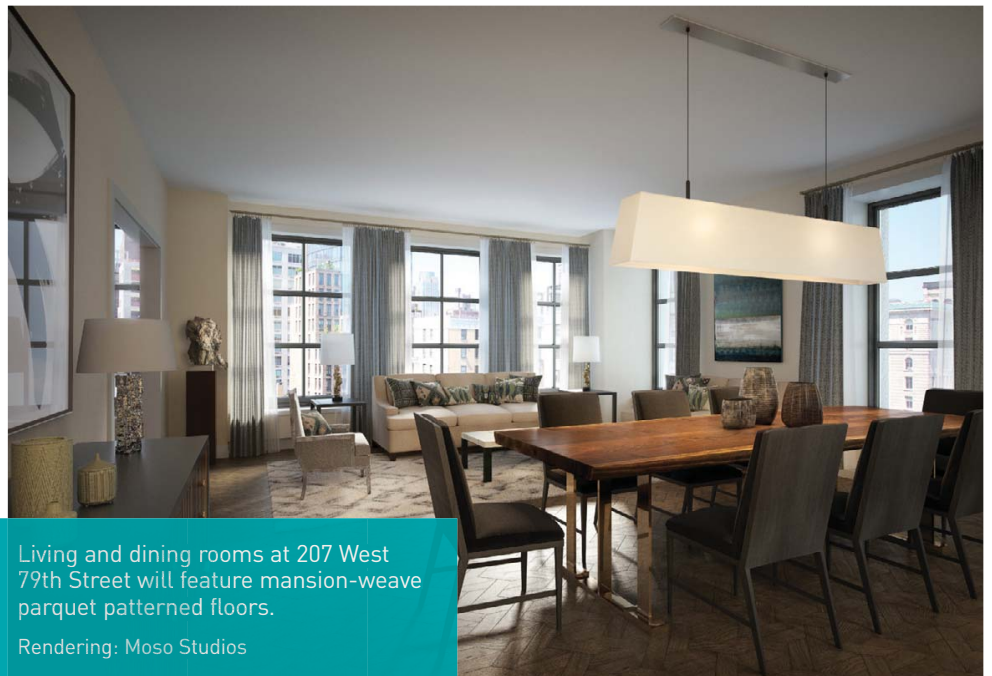
443 GREENWICH

Originally completed in 1884 by architect Charles Coolidge Haight, 443 Greenwich is a former bookbindery that has been transformed by developer MetroLoft and architecture and design firm CetraRuddy into 45 lofts and eight penthouses. The 250,000-square-foot redbrick building, sited on an entire city block in TriBeCa between Desbrosses and Vestry Streets, is now eight stories with the penthouses added on top, and has a sprawling six-sided, 4,000-square-foot interior courtyard designed by HM White landscape architects.

The spacious loft apartments range from 2,000 to 5,000 square feet, with the penthouses ranging from 3,500 to 9,500 square feet. Although the original wooden joists have been painstakingly removed and repurposed throughout the building to improve sound attenuation, the sturdy original 16-inch square Carolina yellow pine beams, each more than 150 years old, remain, helping to retain much of the building's historic character. Amenities include 24-hour doorman and concierge service; children's playroom; landscaped roof terrace with showers for sunbathers and a wet bar; climate-controlled wine cellar; a ham-

The private terrace of this penthouse at 443 Greenwich includes a private plunge pool and a full outdoor kitchen.

Rendering: MetroLoft



Living and dining rooms at 207 West 79th Street will feature mansion-weave parquet patterned floors.

Rendering: Moso Studios

mam with men's and women's locker rooms and a 71-foot lap pool with travertine marble walls, and a fitness center operated by The Wright Fit. The 5,000-square-foot roof deck is outfitted with trellises, outdoor showers and a wet bar. Indoor valet parking, accessible through ornamental wrought iron gates down to a vaulted lower level lobby adorned with period tiled walls, is accessible through its own separate underground entrance.

The Christopher Peacock kitchens are finished in dark-stained white oak cabinetry with walnut interior surfaces and antiqued bronze hardware, with eight-inch-wide white oak plank floors. Appliances include a Miele espresso maker, two dishwashers and a glass-fronted 70-bottle Gaggenau wine refrigerator.

The building, which is in line for LEED certification, is roughly 70 percent sold, including the \$54 million triplex penthouse, which went into contract in July. There is an even larger penthouse on sale now for \$55 million, with 3,500 square feet of private terrace on the roof, which includes a private plunge pool and a full outdoor kitchen with Hudson River views.

"The average size of the apartments is much larger than any other conversion that was attempted in TriBeCa, or any other Lower Manhattan neighborhood," said Richard Cantor, whose

firm, Cantor & Pecorella, is marketing the property. "The privacy of the building is the other differentiator. The second lobby, accessible underground, is exceedingly popular among celebrity buyers, and convenient for all residents."

The building's 12 elevators enhance the sense of privacy. "Technically, it was a challenge to create apartments with entrances directly from the elevators, but the result allowed us to make each apartment feel more like a home, with multiple views," said John Cetra, founding principal of CetraRuddy. "These layouts are large enough to accomplish that, with exterior views and views of the luscious interior courtyard as well. That is not something you often see in historic loft conversions, where the buildings themselves occupy almost the entire lot. Here, because of our innovative design, you can really feel the sense of light, air and space."

The first closings began last June, with the building now roughly 70 percent sold. For more information, call 212-877-4433 or visit 443greenwich.com.

207 WEST 79TH STREET

In November, Anbau, a leading developer of luxury residential properties in New York City, launched sales for 207W79, a new ground-up luxury condominium located at 207 West 79th Street. The full-service condominium will feature 19 expansive prewar-inspired but distinctively modern loft spaces designed by Morris Adjmi Architects. As a landmark project, the generous casement-style windows, custom-made terracotta panels on the brick and limestone façade, and the Art Deco-inspired crown above are designed to complement the historic neighborhood near the American Museum of Natural History between Central Park and Riverside Park in a consciously contextual way.

The two- to six-bedroom residences, along with the two town houses and a penthouse, range from 1,662 to 4,336 square feet, and are priced from \$3.95 to \$15 million. Living and dining rooms will feature mansion-weave parquet patterned floors, many with sweeping sunset views of the Hudson River as well as the Midtown skyline, with kitchens featuring Calacatta marble islands, gray oak cabinetry and classic fixtures by Lefroy Brooks. Amenities include a 24-hour attended lobby, fitness studio, versatile playroom with bleacher seating and integrated cushioned benches, a bike room and private storage.

"The concept was to honor the Upper West Side, where new-construction offerings are exceedingly rare, while at the same time meet the need for quality modern interior design that is often difficult to find in a landmark district," explained Barbara van Beuren, Anbau's managing director. "We were architects before we became developers, and we tend to do projects that are complex, as landmark projects tend to be. We drew a lot from some of the large apartment buildings on Central Park West, and our decorative terra-cotta decorative panels are a reference to materials used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Working with the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission takes time, but in the end, you get a higher-quality building, with a more thoughtful design, with the highest-quality materials."

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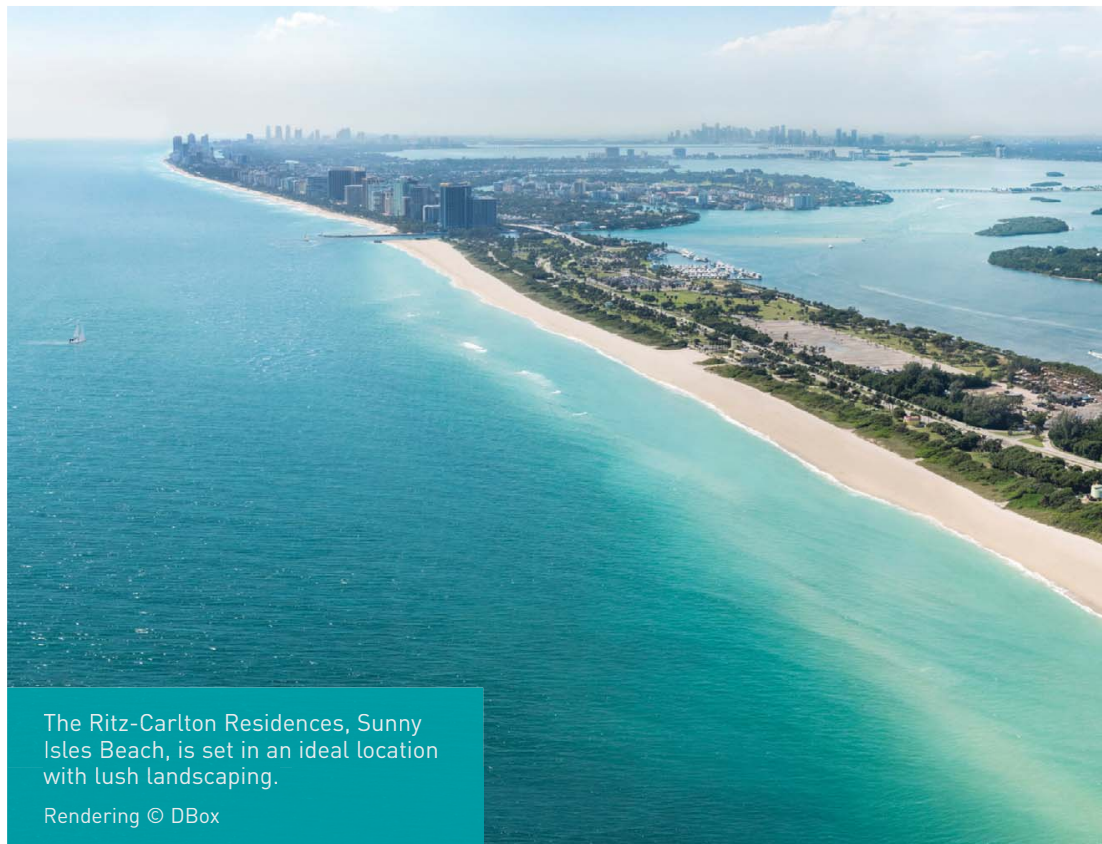


Even though the address is midblock, it behaves like a corner, with plenty of light and air and views from three of the four sides to the north, south and west, where the facing structures are relatively low. “Almost never can you tear down a building and replace it with a new building in a landmarked district, but we were permitted to do that because what was there before was so dramatically altered over the years,” she added. “Besides the exterior, for me, the generous layouts are what makes this an attractive building from a buyer’s perspective — along with its ideal location between the parks, one block to the subway, and close to the entrance to Riverside Drive. We lay out our own floor plans, and room sizes and windows are a priority for us. Morris Adjmi has done many prewar-inspired buildings in landmark districts in TriBeCa, SoHo and Brooklyn, and this site will be one of his best.”

First occupancy is scheduled for the fall, with Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group as the exclusive sales and marketing agency for the building. For more information, call 212-579-0079 or visit www.207W79.com.

ABOVE: The 18-story 121 East 22nd Street tower will boast a dramatic facade.

Rendering: Toll Brothers City Living



The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Sunny Isles Beach, is set in an ideal location with lush landscaping.

Rendering © DBox

121 EAST 22ND STREET

Toll Brothers City Living, the urban development division of Toll Brothers, Inc., in partnership with an affiliate of Gemdale Corporation, one of China’s leading luxury homes builders, recently launched sales of 121 East 22nd Street, a development of 133 residences one block north of Gramercy Park in Manhattan. The 18-story tower will be the first residential building in Manhattan designed by the Office of Metropolitan Architecture, the firm founded by Rem Koolhaas, the 2000 Pritzker Prize winner. The project is Koolhaas’s first ground-up construction venture in New York.

The 22nd Street site, just off Lexington Avenue, straddles Gramercy Park, the venerable and quiet oasis surrounding the borough’s only private park, and NoMad, the bustling commercial area centered around Madison Square Park that is emerging as a vibrant residential enclave. The building is actually two separate towers, connected by the lobby at the base. The south tower is 12 stories, and the north tower is 18 stories, including one ground level of high-end retail along 23rd Street.

The design of the building, which features a diverse mix of studio to five-bedroom layouts starting at \$1.3 million and ranging up to \$10.5 million, reflects these two influences, explained David Von Spreckelsen, president of Toll Brothers City Living N.Y.C. “We like that general area because it bridges downtown with Midtown,” he said. “First, there is the wonderful traditional neighborhood of Gramercy Park, which everyone knows, and NoMad, with plenty of new construction and conversions of old office buildings, as people start to embrace the area as a great place to live. We wanted the building to reflect its surroundings on 22nd Street, which is set next to a beautiful classically styled school, with more traditional punched windows, masonry and precast concrete. Then, as the building extends to 23rd and Lexington, we deformed the corner, which is all glass, with a bent, prismatic look. It is a challenge, and that is why we hired OMA and Koolhaas. The zoning there is fairly restrictive, and we wanted to push the boundaries to get as much design as we could into the project.”

Amenities will include an indoor pool and landscaped courtyard, indoor/outdoor residents’ lounge, a rooftop terrace with a fire pit and grill, a private dining room and catering kitchen, fitness center, screening room and a children’s playroom. Concierge service will be provided by LIVunLtd., run by the founders of Abigail Michaels Concierge. The building will also feature an indoor automated parking system. “It is a large-enough building that we can provide a large



number of amenities for people of all ages and interests, who want their amenities, like an indoor swimming pool and residents' lounge, on the site," concluded Von Spreckelsen. "Our residents will have access to both Gramercy Park, which is a real aspirational neighborhood, and 23rd Street, which is more of a commercial thoroughfare with a lot going on. We think it is an ideal combination."

First occupancy is scheduled for the fall of 2018. The sales gallery is located at 45 East 20th Street, on the 11th floor. For more information, visit 121e22nd.com or call 212-300-4226.

THE RITZ-CARLTON RESIDENCES, SUNNY ISLES BEACH

Sunny Isles has become a hotbed of luxury high-rise development in South Florida, and Ritz-Carlton has chosen an ideal location there for its new Ritz-Carlton Residences, Sunny Isles Beach. An impressive tower is now taking shape on the 2.2-acre site at 15701 Collins Avenue that will soon be home to a 52-story, 649-foot condominium, with 212 homes overlooking 250 linear feet of beachfront. First occupancy is scheduled for next year.

Arquitectonica and Italian interior designer Michele Bönan anchor the creative team chosen by co-developers Fortune International Group and Château Group, two high-powered real estate development companies with extensive track records from South Florida to South America. The tower is designed to provide sweeping ocean and Intracoastal views, with cascading terraces, a grand porte cochère entrance and lush landscaping.



THE RITZ-CARLTON RESIDENCES

SUNNY ISLES BEACH, MIAMI



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NO2 OPUS PLACE

In November, Olympia Heights Management announced a new mixed-use development called Opus Place, located at 98 14th Street in Midtown Atlanta, with a master plan designed by architect Richard Meier. The Pritzker Prize winner, already well known in Atlanta for his 1980s design of the High Museum of Art at Peachtree Street in Midtown in the city's arts district, is also the architect of the Getty Center in Los Angeles, the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art and several high-profile residential buildings in New York City.

At about 690 feet in height, the 53-story tower, designed by Perkins + Will, will be the tallest all-residential building in Atlanta, the sixth tallest overall, and the first large-scale development undertaken in the city since the Great Recession. Interiors will be designed by Alexandra Champalimaud & Associates. "With all the growth of Midtown, there is huge pent-up demand for this development," said Kerman Haynes, vice president of Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Georgia Properties' City Haus division. "The 4.5-acre Opus Place, which will also feature a cultural and commercial pavilion designed by Richard Meier, will transform the heart of Midtown, and No2 will be an iconic addition to Atlanta's skyline. The building will have a lifestyle curator and 45,000 square feet of amenity space. It is like nothing Atlanta has seen before."

Opus Place is designed to be the new cultural center of Atlanta, with the High Museum, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and the Alliance Theater, Woodruff Arts Center and the Museum of Design Atlanta nearby. "We see Opus Place as an opportunity to connect it all, in effect changing the center of gravity from Buckhead, which is not on a grid system, to Midtown, which is," added Haynes. "With all the growth, congestion is becoming an issue with Buckhead, but Midtown, with the wonderful Piedmont Park, designed by the sons of Frederick Law Olmsted, this area is becoming an attractive urban environment again, without cars, where people can walk to the different venues, restaurants and the park itself. With Richard Meier coming back, it is a sign that Midtown is maturing, and he is pouring his heart and soul into the design. It is a true legacy project for him."

Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Georgia Properties' City Haus Division is handling the sales and marketing for No2 Opus Place. First occupancy is slated for late 2019 or early 2020. For more information, call 404-266-8100 or visit opusplaceatlanta.com. 



No2 Opus Place in Midtown Atlanta, will be the tallest all-residential building in the city.

Rendering: ArX Solutions

The spacious two- to four-bedroom residences range from 1,605 to 3,640 square feet, with penthouses up to 6,320 square feet. The Residences recently sold one of the penthouses for \$21 million, setting a record for Sunny Isles. The club lounge on the 32nd floor is an entire floor for residents and their guests to enjoy the views and the services of the club. The floor includes eight guest suites, also managed by Ritz-Carlton, for owners to reserve when they have visitors.

"The top floors of the property will be home to the most elegant and spacious penthouses in Sunny Isles Beach, many with expansive terraces, summer kitchens, private gardens and infinity pools ideal for outdoor entertaining," said Manuel Grosskopf, chief executive of Château Group. "This is a 52-story tower that simply could not be built along the ocean in Miami Beach because of zoning restrictions — and that is the beauty of Sunny Isles. In our building, you can walk from your very stylish high-rise, and be on the beach without having to cross a street. Then having Ritz-Carlton taking care of everything a resident could want presents buyers with a very appealing luxury package of amenities and service — all very close to Bal Harbour and Aventura, two very popular destinations in south Florida that are expanding because of their enormous popularity. On top of that, we don't have the transient traffic that hotels can bring. So you have the tranquility of living in your home, with Ritz-Carlton service there when you need it."

The newly opened sales office is located across from the site, at 15800 Collins Avenue, with a sample kitchen and bathroom on display. Prices start at \$2.5 million. For more information, call 305-503-5811 or visit the residencesunnyislesbeach.com.

SCIENCE

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Kelela

(Continued from Page 34)

culture,” Kelela says, “is that the whole idea is that you don’t have to be perfect. Just try. Let’s just try to make it ourselves.” At first she sang over indie rock, but it didn’t feel authentic to her. She wanted to experiment with electronic music — “not real instruments,” she says.

She spent hours on MySpace, scrolling through pages of music and listening to instrumentals. She recorded herself singing over sounds she liked. Then she would send the artist her sample, along with an invitation to collaborate. Two notable electronic producers agreed, including Daedelus, who featured her on a track. At the same time, a friend introduced her to the electro duo Teengirl Fantasy, and they created a song. Will Boston, a founder of the music label Fade to Mind, heard their collaboration and was impressed by what he described to me as her “wealth of startling honesty, felt through her vocals.”

By then, Kelela was living in Los Angeles, and Boston brought her a thumb drive of sounds from the label and its British counterpart, Night Slugs. Kelela spent the next several days poring over the files, improvising lyrics over the sounds she liked, turning them into songs. She loved the otherworldliness of the instrumentals — staccato mixes that used sound effects like tinkling glass and guns reloading over drum machines. The music complemented the gossamer scales she likes to sing in. It was “exactly what I’d been looking for,” she says. Two of the songs she produced during this time were on the mixtape she released in 2013. Kelela took care to describe her role in developing the mixtape, to make certain I knew how active she was in it — perhaps to counter the idea that she isn’t self-made or in charge of her own sound. “The first thing people want to take away from me is my agency,” she told me.

Alex Sushon, an electronic producer who goes by Bok Bok, was one of the artists Kelela met as she was working on her mixtape, and these days, she tends to work mostly with British producers like him, possibly because they’ve been pushing the boundaries of R.&B.

more aggressively by blending it with grime, the East London style of dance music. Electronica, Sushon told me, is referential in the same way that R.&B. tends to be. “That’s how we think about music, inserting small samples from other genres, little shortcuts that are saying something by playing something,” he says. Because of the internet, he explained, musicians can share references more easily than they did in the past. Google, YouTube and SoundCloud make it easy. Sushon compares this dynamic to “memes, but in musical form.”

The closest analogy is sampling, but it’s more complex than that. I watched Kelela and her D.J. perform this trick onstage, during one of their songs in Strasbourg. While she was singing “The High,” a fuzzed-out, gritty ode to desire, Sih mixed in a few seconds of a 2002 song by Tweet called “Oops (Oh My),” and Kelela segued into its vocals. Here, suddenly, was the thrilling flicker of a decade-old hit that had almost entirely faded from popular culture, tucked into her own noir love song. It was the perfect encapsulation of Kelela’s odd 21st-century gift for taking familiar sounds and repurposing them in a new context, a kind of lyrical déjà vu.

After the show, back at her Strasbourg Airbnb, Kelela changed into oversize gray sweatpants and a black button-down crop top, and padded into the kitchen in white slippers. She plugged in an electric kettle and made another cup of ginger tea as our conversation turned to her debut album. I expected her to talk about its sound, but she wanted to speak about the intention behind it. She described the album as “something that speaks to power.” When I asked her to elaborate, she paused, then said: “I’m not talking to black people, to be honest. I don’t need to tell black people that R.&B. is deep. It’s about the music industry. When I say the white gaze, I’m not just talking about white people at my show. I like that. I like playing to mixed crowds. For me, it’s really just the way I’m treated by people of positions of power who seemingly hold the key.”

The dynamics that bothered Kelela in college didn’t disappear when she became an artist — if anything, they intensified. As a student, she was introduced to

black academics and feminists like Audre Lorde, Bell Hooks and Angela Davis. These women helped her make sense of the racial and sexist forces that shape the world, and she still turns to them to navigate the music industry. She internalized their insistence to not be apologetic for her womanhood or blackness and not be debilitated by exclusion.

Sprawled on the bed in the apartment’s master bedroom, Kelela told me that Beyoncé’s loss at the Grammys depressed her and made her question the metrics of success for mainstream musicians. “If that’s the highest we can achieve in that framework, it doesn’t even make sense to try,” she told me. A notebook was open to a blank page on the night stand, alongside “B Jenkins,” a Fred Moten poetry book that explores the interstitial space among jazz, black aesthetics and politics. Moten’s work concerns itself with the “resistance of the object” and the way that blackness refuses commodification. Kelela is aware of how artists like her get co-opted, morphed into something symbolic that they no longer control, and is determined to avoid it.

I had already heard the lengths to which she would go to prevent this from happening. The first night we met, I asked her how she managed expectations as an artist in an age of hyperconsumption. I mostly meant her reserve on social media, despite the disturbingly insistent demands in her Twitter and Instagram mentions for her next release. Instead, she described an encounter with Fendi, the Italian luxury brand, which invited her to perform at its new headquarters in Rome to celebrate the start of a new website aimed at millennials. Researching the headquarters online, she discovered that the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, the impressive white marble colosseum that Fendi had taken over, was built to be a propaganda tool under Benito Mussolini. “I’m Ethiopian,” she reminded me: Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1935, just before World War II. She didn’t want her body, her blackness, to be used by a brand, even a big fashion label like Fendi, as a proxy for cool in this context. She asked Fendi representatives to agree to release a statement addressing her concerns

as a condition of her involvement. “That flipped the whole damn script,” she said. They’re still negotiating the partnership, but the interaction speaks to how Kelela views her role: “If an artist says something, people listen,” she told me. She sees herself as someone who can wield her status as a celebrity to catalyze change.

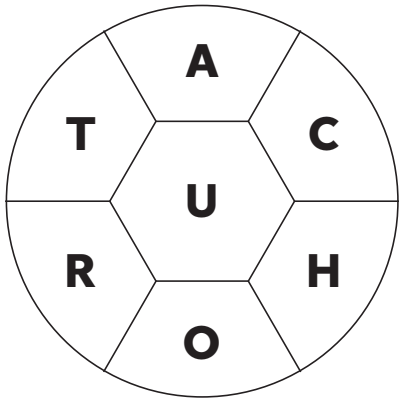
As the evening wound down, Kelela invited me to get comfortable and listen to some of her new tracks. She gave me earbuds and left me alone to listen. (When I pressed her about a release date, she made a coquettish face and demurred, saying the songs were still being mixed. In reality, she just signed with Warp Records, which will take over the release of the album.) Earlier in the night, she said that as politically aware as she feels she is, she didn’t make an album that addresses those views. “There was a period after I finished all the songs, I was nervous because I was like: There’s nothing about my experience as a black woman overtly in this. But I could never not make anything from any other place.” The songs instead deal with the agony of falling out of love and the ecstasy finding it anew. Her voice is as pretty as ever, rising and crashing like cresting waves over beats that swing from a druggy drone to throbbing bass lines perfect for dance-floor grinding. In their own way, they are a quiet protest: They feel radical in the way a Kerry James Marshall painting or a Ntozake Shange poem expresses the humanity and beauty of black life. “All of that is happening in a world that does not want me,” she said. “It is a safe space for us to feel, and not necessarily for anyone else.” ♦

SPELLING BEE

By Frank Longo

How many common words of 5 or more letters can you spell using the letters in the hive? Every answer must use the center letter at least once. Letters may be reused in a word. At least 1 word will use all 7 letters. Proper names and hyphenated words are not allowed. Score 1 point for each answer, and 3 points for a word that uses all 7 letters.

Rating: 9 = good; 15 = excellent; 21 = genius



Our list of words, worth 28 points, appears with last week's answers.

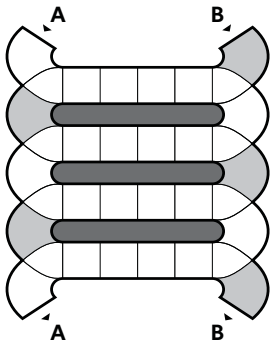
WINDING DOWN

By Patrick Berry

Answers to Path A clues wind down the grid along the unshaded path, one after another, starting in the upper left. Answers to Path B clues wind down the opposite way, starting in the shaded space at the upper right. When the grid is filled, the letters in the shaded squares will spell a word that can precede "down."

PATH A
18-wheeler • "Bad Moms" actress Christina • One of Donald Duck's nephews • Gets to first without a hit

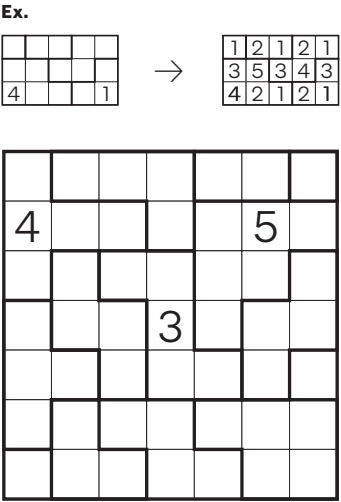
PATH B
When reserve forces are deployed • Clothes • Letter before iota • Tech expert, informally • "You'll hear from my ___!"



CAPSULES

By Wei-Hwa Huang

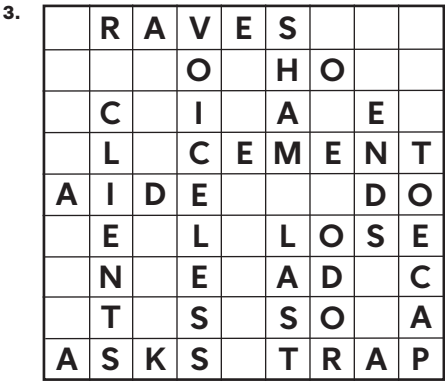
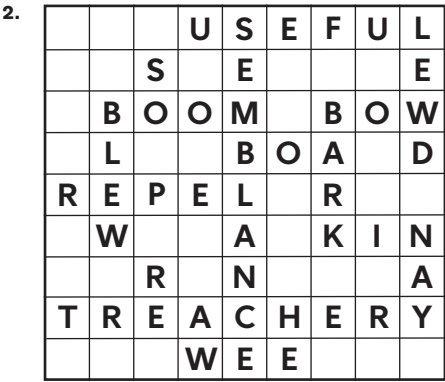
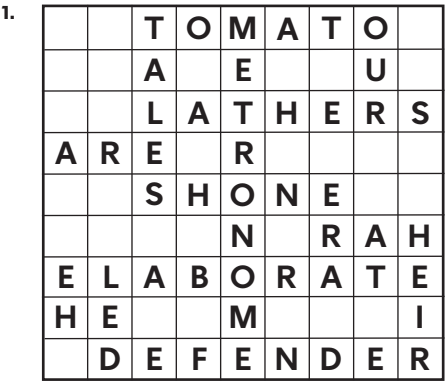
Place numbers in the grid so that each outlined region contains the numbers 1 to n, where n is the number of squares in the region. The same number can never touch itself, not even diagonally.



MISSING LINKS

By Gary Disch

The grids below are like miniature Scrabble crossword games in the middle of play. The object is to insert the 15 letters beneath each board into the pattern to create a fuller interlock of common, uncapitalized words reading across and down. You may cross out these letters when you use them, because each letter beneath the grid will be used exactly once. Each puzzle has a unique solution.



PUZZLE #1

A B D D I
L M N N S
S T U V X

PUZZLE #2

A A A A C
E E F N P
P P R T W

PUZZLE #3

A C E F K
L L M P P
T T T U Y

Future

(Continued from Page 24)

he said in delight, then waved away Shooter, his ever-present personal photographer. "Let us have this moment." Apparently emboldened, the reporter shared more. "I've been drinking 'cause I'm nervous," she told him. She had ended a long-term relationship, she said, because of his music.

In person, Future provides no outward signs that you should approach him with confessionals. He's imposingly tall and more than a little grave. He is also beautiful. (L.A. Reid, chairman of Epic Records, who signed Future, told me of their initial meeting: "Usually I ask people to audition. Future, I didn't even want him to move. 'Let's get you signed while you're sitting there looking like that.'") But the TV reporter went for it, and it was brave. And almost immediately, Future went back to thumbing through his phone. He either hadn't heard what she said or he chose to ignore it. After a few beats of silence he finally looked up. "Ay, what's the name of this hotel?"

The next day, I finally had my chance to connect. We were upstairs at a middlebrow bistro with a lot of bare wood, and Future had just finished off an impromptu date. His partner had off-white blond hair tucked under an actually white baseball cap and was wearing a combination bodysuit/tunic (also white). She'd brought him a late Valentine's Day gift, a nice puffy coat: "It's that Chanel swag!" she announced. They ate sushi, chicken wings and steak salad. She told him that when she travels, she likes to stay at Airbnbs because that way you get "immersed" in local culture.

And I know this because during the totality of the date, the team and I were sitting at the adjoining table. Eventually his date left, and Future announced his verdict on the holiday, to grins from the crew: "Man this Valentine's Day [expletive] a setup."

Finally, we talked. I brought up London. He smiled. I guess you could call it a sheepish smile. I told him it really didn't seem as if he wanted to do press at all. I asked

him why he was going through with it. "I don't wanna do it," he said, maybe even relieved to say it out loud. "My publicist like: 'Man, why you got a publicist if you don't wanna do press?' I'm trying to give you the real me, but they want me to be fake, so I'd rather not even say nothing."

The conversation rolled on, meandered. It even clicked into gear at a few points. He talked about his itinerant childhood, how he never wanted to have a fixed address so no one with an antagonistic agenda would ever be able to find him. He talked about the love and care of the family members that sorted him out. He remembered the joy of playing "Racks," an early hit, for the first time and how the D.J. loved it so much he didn't want to give the CD back. And he said that it all, eventually, changed everything. "Back then, I had no feelings," he told me. "It wasn't until I started doing music that I started to really have a conscience."

It was nice, and fleeting. But I never was able to get a hook into him. I never could formulate a question that made him want to really talk. When I called DJ Spinz, one of Future's regular collaborators, he told me about Future's work ethic, his remarkable ability to unfurl a whole song after 20 minutes of hearing a beat roll. But nothing he said felt as relevant as when he told me this: "Future doesn't speak much."

I was reminded of a moment back in London. I had stuck around after Nando's long enough to try to finagle my way into the show. My move was to sidle close to the stage door, in the alley, hoping for an opening. It never came. Upon Future's arrival, his luxury sedan idled until minutes before his set time. Then he exited the back seat and walked directly through the stage door, surrounded by an imposing security detail, with the massive hood of an arctic parka over his head. I never even saw his face.

I chased Future through two separate sovereign nations and walked away remembering one thing: I love rappers. They never break character. ♦

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TAKING THE FIFTH

By Alan Arbesfeld

ACROSS

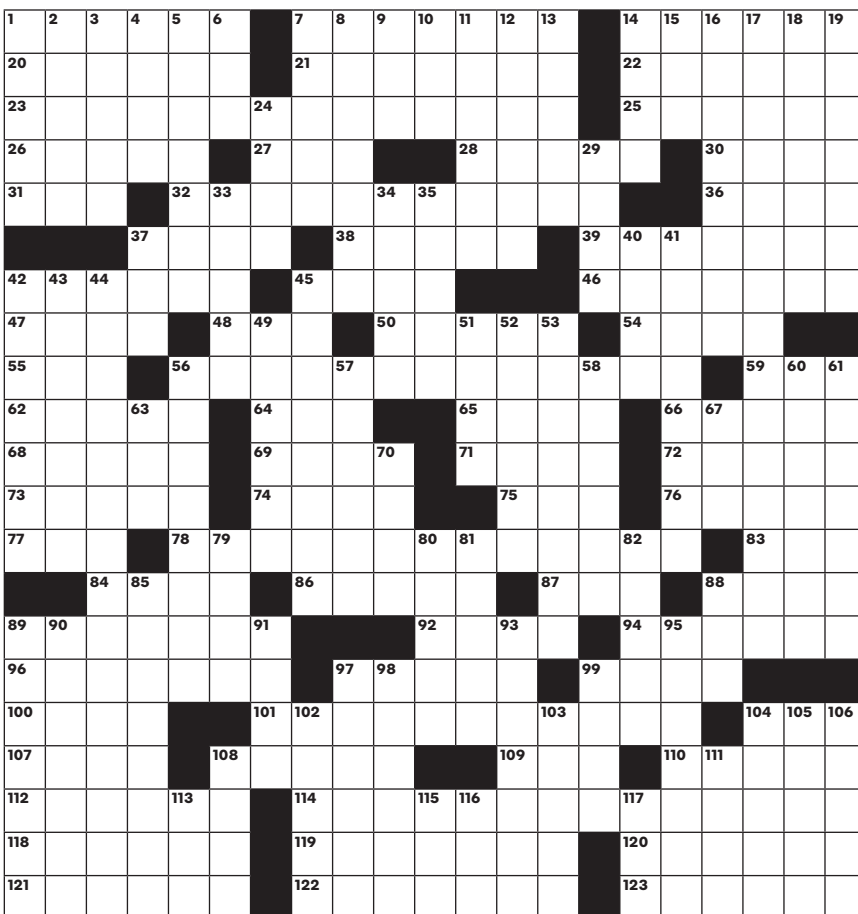
- 1 Chest protectors
7 The 2000s, with "the"
14 Camry competitor
20 Fisher of fashion
21 Coming up
22 1943 conference site
23 "Put that Southern state on next month's agenda?"
25 Like some wedding cakes and stadiums
26 Sulk
27 Pooh's pal
28 New York :: The Big Apple :: ___ : The Big Guava
30 Pain in the neck
31 Go off course
32 What a male babysitter may sport?
36 Panama, e.g.: Abbr.
37 Numbskull
38 Minuscule, informally
39 Romantic liaison
42 Shared with, as a story
45 Ending with chick
46 Spoils, in a way
47 Playing a fifth N.F.L. period, say
48 Romanian currency
50 Capital of Yemen
54 Race pace
55 ___ volante (God willing)
- 56 Like a fired Broadway star?
59 Small handful
62 Comedian Smirnoff
64 Auric Goldfinger, to James Bond
65 Leave thunderstruck
66 Color in "America the Beautiful"
68 Do to do
69 A.A.A. and B.B.B.
71 Jai ___
72 One in a crowd at a bookstore?
73 Total
74 Billiards feature
75 South American greeting
76 Eskimo-___ languages
77 Winter hrs. in Vail
78 Sweaty, irritable rabbit?
83 Suffix with nod-
84 Follow
86 Really bother
87 Grp. in the Oscar-winning documentary "Citizenfour"
88 Kunis of "Black Swan"
89 Stuck
92 Bit of bar food
94 Real hoot
96 Commotions
97 Setting for many Stephen King novels
99 "The Persistence of Memory" artist

DOWN

- 100 "Pencils down!"
101 What'll feed everyone at a tailgate party?
104 "What else could it be?!"
107 Road to the Forum, e.g.
108 "Lovergirl" singer ___ Marie
109 Christmas-song contraction
110 Broadway star Rivera
112 Supermodel Bündchen
114 Reformed barbarian?
118 Start of a marital spat?
119 2000s TV hit set in Baltimore
120 Guinness entry
121 Vocal quavers
122 A cross might be given for it
123 Invites across the threshold

DOWN

- 1 Held in reserve
2 Queen topper
3 Jostle
4 Move, informally
5 Is obliged to
6 Soldier, for one
7 Curtain fabric
8 Ticked off
9 Wear and tear
10 Some sporty cars
11 Popular landscaping plants
12 Compact



- 13 Dreaded comment on a returned exam
14 Lead-in to boy or girl
15 Island chain?
16 1993 film that garnered Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress Oscars

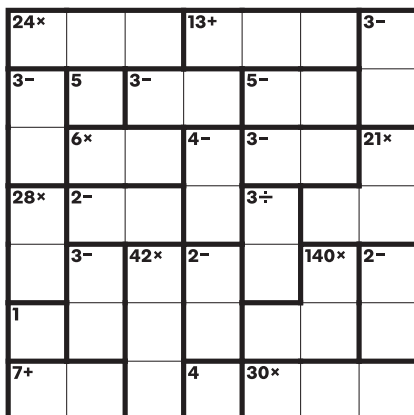
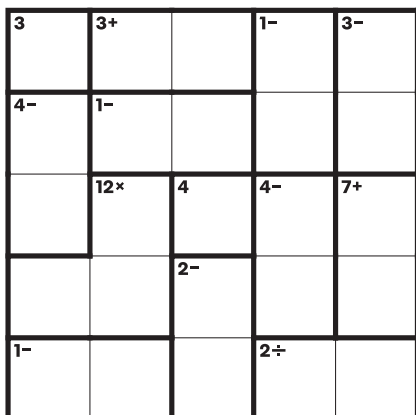
- 17 Turnaround too tempting to pass up?
18 Wand wielder
19 "What happened next?"
24 Puzzle inventor Rubik
29 Brandy fruit
33 Unpopular baby name
34 Formation fliers
35 Hour in the graveyard shift
37 Target of a 1972 ban
40 It's inescapable
41 "Shoot!"
42 Nice piece of change
43 Plays without a break
44 "Check out the Argentine soccer star!"
45 500, e.g.
49 Exorcitation
51 Grp. that might have a launch party
52 Where kids get creative in school
53 Diving equipment co-invented by Jacques Cousteau

- 56 Shout from an arm waver
57 Exodus
58 They may have many chapters
60 Part of the brain that controls involuntary functions
61 Reds, Blues or Browns
63 World Cup chant
67 Start to practice?
70 Schedule position
79 Baltic Sea feeder
80 2005 horror sequel
81 Undercover operation
82 Stuffy-sounding
85 Heavenly
88 Picture of health, in brief?
89 Tense
90 First African-American to win a Best Actor Oscar
91 Tivoli's Villa d'___

- 93 Attractions for bees
95 They're always tired
97 French ice-cream flavorer
98 Lessener
99 Gossip
102 Moor
103 "___ where they ain't"
104 Natural-history-museum exhibits, for short
105 Centers of early development
106 Composer who taught Beethoven
108 "Bill & ___ Excellent Adventure"
111 Pawn
113 Short, for short
115 1945 battle site, informally
116 2018 Super Bowl number
117 Internet ___ (what we live in)

KENKEN

Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 5x5 grid will use the digits 1-5. A 7x7 grid will use 1-7.



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Answers to puzzles of 3.5.17

IT'S ELEMENTARY

P	O	W	S			S	P	A	C	E	B	A	R			M	A	T	Z	O	
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KENKEN

3	1	2	5	4
4	3	5	2	1
2	4	1	3	5
1	5	3	4	2
5	2	4	1	3

7	1	5	2	3	4	6
1	2	3	6	4	7	5
5	3	7	1	6	2	4
2	6	4	5	7	1	3
3	4	1	7	5	6	2
4	7	6	3	2	5	1
6	5	2	4	1	3	7

ACROSTIC

PAGAN KENNEDY, INVENTOLOGY — "[N]egative spaces" are the zones in which people create without seeking to patent their ideas. ... [F]olk songs, magic tricks, ... hairstyles, Wikipedia, languages, and roller-derby noms de guerre ... have emerged from the negative spaces.

- | | | |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| A. Pie chart | I. Nightwear | Q. Nobel |
| B. Amateur | J. Escher | R. Tortoise |
| C. Gaslight | K. Ding-dong | S. Oversaw |
| D. Acetate | L. Yardstick | T. Lemon peel |
| E. Newsgroup | M. Iridesce | U. Opsimath |
| F. Knife Edge | N. Needlefish | V. Gate leg |
| G. Eureka | O. Vice versa | W. Ypres |
| H. No thanks | P. Emphasize | |

FOR STARTERS

	H	O	J	G	C
T	O	R	E	R	O
B	O	T	T	O	M
S	V	E	L	T	E
L	E	G	A	T	O
D	R	A	G	O	N

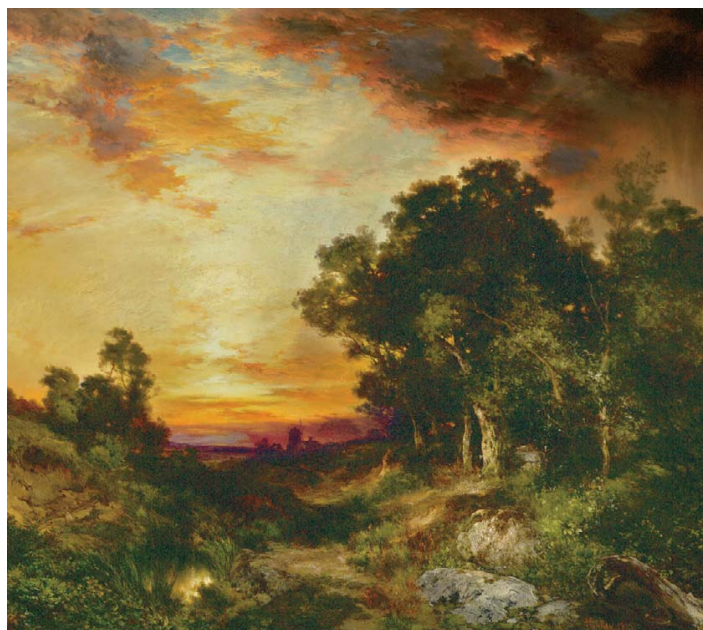
CAPSULES

2	5	1	3	2	4	1
1	3	2	4	5	3	5
4	5	1	3	2	1	4
2	3	2	5	4	3	2
4	1	4	3	1	5	4
5	2	5	2	4	2	1
1	4	3	1	3	5	3

Answers to puzzle on Page 78

SPELLING BEE

Coauthor, cutthroat (3 points each). Also: Actuator, aurora, author, autocrat, church, churro, couch, court, couth, crouch, crutch, curacao, curator, cutout, hurrah, hutch, occur, outro, touch, trout, truth, tutor. If you found other legitimate dictionary words in the beehive, feel free to include them in your score.



BE UNCOOL

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YOU PLAY YOU

Last November, Metallica did something extraordinary: It put out a new album, “Hardwired ... to Self-Destruct,” that actually sounded like Metallica. On paper, a band acting like itself seems normal. But consider Metallica’s output since its megaselling self-titled LP in 1991, better known as “The Black Album.” There was the “alt-rock haircut” phase of “Load and Re-Load.” The “Let’s stop playing guitar solos”

phase of “St. Anger.” And, most regrettable, the “Collaborate with Lou Reed on a confounding art-rock opus about a 19th-century German femme fatale” phase of “Lulu.”

Contrast those digressions with “Spit Out the Bone,” the kinetic seven-minute closer of “Hardwired.” Dueling riffs by the guitarists James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett race forward at a frightening velocity. Lars Ulrich bashes out a martial beat that sounds like a velociraptor trapped inside a washing machine. And Robert Trujillo’s melodically sinister bass snakes below the maelstrom, a demon lurking in the shadows. “Spit Out the Bone” epitomizes the thrash-metal formula that Metallica helped invent in the early ’80s and then tried to avoid for the past quarter-century. On “Hardwired ... to Self-Destruct,” it’s almost as if those 25 years never happened.

Not giving the people what they want has been admired as a gesture of

artistic fortitude in music, going back at least to Igor Stravinsky, whose premiere of his dissonant masterwork, “The Rite of Spring,” caused a riot at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris in 1913. More recently, a boxed set collecting every known concert recording from Bob Dylan’s 1966 tour — 36 discs in all — was released last fall. The exhaustive document chronicles a pivotal period for rock’s poet laureate, who angered folk fans by “going electric.” Now it’s possible to hear nearly every instance of an audience jeering loudly as Dylan introduced “Like a Rolling Stone” and other songs into his live repertoire.

Metallica once embraced a foundational idea of “progressive” popular music: Change constantly or become instantly irrelevant, even if those stylistic shifts alienate your fans. But in an age when a plurality of niches has supplanted the mainstream that Metallica once conquered, there’s a new kind of street

cred that comes with sticking to what you’re known for. Now it’s listeners who contain multitudes. It’s up to us to create eclectic playlists designed for a variety of moods and situations. For a veteran band like Metallica, that means being rewarded for playing to type. “Hardwired ... to Self-Destruct” debuted at No. 1 and was the best-selling rock album in years.

Is it antithetical to art to suggest that “know your brand” is the future not just of music, but also all of entertainment? George Lucas sold the “Star Wars” franchise to Disney in 2012, and now J.J. Abrams makes the sort of “fun” “Star Wars” movies that Lucas was trying to get away from with his little-loved, self-serious prequels. Lucas never recovered after making his versions of “Load,” “St. Anger” and “Lulu.” Metallica should be grateful that it still gets to make Metallica records.

Steven Hyden

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made a
playlist called
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your cat”**
when they
could have
been making
flyers.

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even create your own playlists.



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